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Richmond Racial Equity Essays: 24 Visions for Racial Equity in Richmond

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RICHMOND RACIAL EQUITY ESSAYS

24 Visions for Racial Equity in Richmond

EDITED BY Ebony Walden & Meghan Z. Gough, PhD

SEPTEMBER 2021

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EBONY WALDEN
and
MEGHAN Z. GOUGH

The world is indeed a different place than it was when the idea for this essay project was conceived in 2019. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the tragic murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protests, activism and increased awareness of racial inequities and injustice, the need for a diversity of voices and solutions are even more timely and necessary as we try to recover and move forward. We, as a nation and city have hopefully sharpened our commitment to live differently, work more purposely and pursue racial justice with even greater fervor. It is our sincere desire that this essay project helps lead Richmond in that direction, that the words of the essayists inspire us all to action.

The inspiration to create this essay collection came from numerous places. As urban planners practicing as a diversity, equity and inclusion consultant and a professor, we often sit in rooms with Richmonders from various sectors who are constantly talking about equity—what it is and how we get there. These conversations too often happen in silos. We wanted Richmond to have a broader and deeper cross-sector conversation about what equity, especially racial equity means for our city, in practice and from practitioners who could offer concrete strategies and solutions. Secondly, The Richmond Racial Equity Essays was inspired by and modeled after The Just City Essays: 26 Visions of Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity, an e-book of 26 Essays edited by Toni L. Griffin, Ariella Cohen and David Maddox and published by J. Max Bond Center on Design for the Just City at the City College of New York, the *Nature of Cities* and *Next City*.

Using The Just City Essays as a model, we wanted to co-create a similar collection of essays. With the help of Duron Chavis, our vision morphed into a multimedia project to include video interviews and a virtual discussion series, focused on racial equity in Richmond. We ventured to capture voices from all walks of life and sectors in Richmond, representing the diversity of ideas, identities and perspectives in our city. We asked essayists to explore 1) what an equitable Richmond would like, especially as it relates to racial equity and 2) highlight the strategies that will help us get there. You will find in this collection, a multiplicity of ideas and perspectives. You will also see themes that are both complementary and intersecting **on topics such as housing, education, economic inclusion, transportation, language access, the environment and more**. Collectively, this anthology creates a platform for understanding racial equity and the different dimensions of racism, gives voice to some of the great work already being done, and highlights ideas and solutions that will help shape our collective future for the better.

This is, however, just a starting point for bringing together a broad array of thinkers and practitioners that are working toward social change. Hopefully this project is a catalyst for engaging other voices and perspectives that might not be represented here; to inspire others to discuss, assess and champion racial equity in their own communities and organizations. But ultimately, we hope this collection provides a framework for advancing racial equity in Richmond that leads to sustained action and the transformation of our beloved city.

Ebony and Meghan

PLANNING FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Black and Brown Centered Placemaking Rooted in Identity and Ownership

EBONY WALDEN
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Consultant & Urban Planner, Ebony Walden Consulting

As a Black woman who grew up in New York and has now lived in Virginia for 18 years, I've seen racial differences written into every landscape of my life for as long as I can remember. I began to notice these differences when I was around 8 years old. As I rode through my working-class Black and Latino community in Hempstead, NY into Garden City or Rockville Center, white communities directly north and south respectively, everything changed. The corner stores, liquor stores and modest homes transitioned into larger homes with bigger lawns, better shopping and better schools; better everything, it seemed. That shift in the built environment signified wealth and whiteness, which was quite the contrast from some of the struggling neighborhoods in my community. If I had just interpreted what I saw in these differences, I would have surmised that there was something better about white neighborhoods, white schools, and white shopping areas. Maybe even that white people were better. I never really believed that, though my eyes told me otherwise as I looked at the streets and observed larger society**.** I always sensed that something was awry in the world around me, that I lived in a twilight zone, where Black prosperity seemed the exception and white thriving the rule. However, I knew that there wasn't anything intrinsically better about those communities or the white people that lived in them. I'd been bused to an all-white school for a few years when I lived in Queens. I was the only Black girl in my class. I felt out of place, I didn't talk much and was almost left back. It wasn't until I went to a Black and brown school district in Long Island, that I moved up several reading levels and began to thrive. They saw me. The white school had more resources and wealthier parents, but a Black environment supported my thriving.

Though I grew up around hardworking Black and brown folks, the places I lived were labeled "distressed" and I was considered "disadvantaged," because I lived in single parent household where we struggled to make ends meet and was enrolled in a low performing school district. In order to flip my "disadvantaged" status on its head, I strove to become the epitome of success by graduating at the top of my class and going off to Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Now, as a successful Black entrepreneur who "beat the odds," I am considered an exception. I, however, am not satisfied with being an anomaly. Even under the worst oppression, there were some Black people that were successful. What would be exceptional is if Black and brown prosperity were the norm. What if we had a system that encouraged Black and brown prosperity? What if we had a system that valued and invested in it, and removed the greatest barriers to it: systemic racism and economic inequality—both of which feed into each other. What if we had neighborhoods and communities that displayed, supported and celebrated Black and brown prosperity rooted in property and business ownership and a robust cultural identity?

I went into urban planning because I wanted to create these types of communities, where Black and brown prosperity was written into the landscape. I wanted to see more Black and brown communities with renovated buildings, grocery stores selling healthy food, quality housing, and successful businesses and commercial buildings owned by the people who lived in the neighborhood. Neighborhoods where Black and brown presence and culture are celebrated, not seen as signs of degradation. **This is still my hope; to help create a racially equitable Richmond that is absent of starkly visible differences in streets and streetscapes, parks, housing, services, schools and**

business districts between the mostly Black and brown communities in the East End, North Side and South Side—and those in the West End—wealthier and whiter.

To do this, we must intentionally acknowledge and address the racial inequities that have become the norm in our community. Data outlined in Richmond 300 (the city's master plan) Insights Report and RVA Green 2050 (the city's climate resilience planning process) Equity Index show that the wealth, health, school performance, housing and homeownership and environmental disparities are racial, economic and geographic – the neighborhoods that are not thriving are Black and brown and in certain sections of the city. I'd bet there has also been disparities in city capital improvement spending in Richmond, otherwise sidewalks and street repairs and streetscape improvements would be more equitably distributed.

We need to be comfortable with difference, to celebrate diversity and to make sure those that are marginalized are at the table and have power.

We have to be diligent and vigilant in unmasking and disrupting white supremacy and the ways it has shaped our urban environment. We know the history of redlining, highway construction through Jackson Ward, concentrating public housing, and how Black and brown communities were targeted for subprime lending and experienced the greatest impact on wealth, foreclosures and homeownership from the Great Recession. Black wealth is at an all-time low; we have lost 3,600 Black homeowners in Richmond, and our city is gentrifying. We are far from "ONE" Richmond. We are, like most places, a tale of two cities, one prospering and white, and the other mostly struggling and Black and brown. I am not sure what we need is unity. We need to be comfortable with difference, to celebrate diversity and to make sure those that are marginalized are at the table and have power. We need to work to upend the disparities that have been associated with our differences for far too long. My equitable Richmond includes thriving Black and brown communities centered on and celebrating cultural identity and ownership in intentional neighborhood-centric ways. **Creating neighborhoods and communities rooted in Black and brown cultural identity, while supporting ownership and entrepreneurship will be keys to advancing racial equity in our city.**

Create Communities Rooted in Black & Brown Identity & Excellence

We may not be initially aware of it, but we have created spaces and institutions that cater to and reflect whiteness. What if we also intentionally created Black spaces, and other cultural spaces that reflected the broad diversity of our community. When I travel, there is a natural draw for locals and tourists to Chinatowns, Little Italys, Koreatowns or other neighborhoods rooted in specific identities and cultures but are also welcoming and attractive to visitors and residents of all types. What if Richmond had the 21st century equivalent to a Jackson Ward at its height, representative of Black prosperity? What if we uplifted Latino businesses and culture in the South Side, in our placemaking? Local projects that I have worked on as an urban planning consultant that desire to reimagine once prosperous Black neighborhoods in our current landscape have craved this rootedness in cultural identity, art, business and prosperity. These values and ideas were reflected in the recent neighborhood plan for the area of Jackson Ward North of 95 and the Staff Hill Small Area Plan that I worked on in Charlottesville's Vinegar Hill, a Black community razed by Urban Renewal. Both projects' values and goals were rooted in equity and Black prosperity and created a vision for homeownership, entrepreneurship, and cultural arts rooted in African American history and culture. There are models for this type of placemaking around the country. There is Domino Park in Little Havana in Miami, a park infused with art, community and play specifically for Latinos; or Homecoming, an art project that preserves and celebrates Black stories and presence in the Hill Neighborhood in Pittsburgh.

Black and Brown Centered Placemaking Rooted in Identity and Ownership

We must be intentional about creating, visioning and cultivating these places or the default will be market driven neighborhood development rooted in whiteness and promoting gentrification, which often has the form of "diversity" but not the substance. In such places, you may have a diversity of food and culture, but the businesses, buildings and homes are not owned by people of color and perhaps they can't even afford to live and run businesses there anymore (which is one by-product of gentrification). Though gentrification is technically creating multi-racial, mixed-income communities, however, when the majority of the white folks are higher income and the people of color are lower-income and/or if displacement takes place, it is actually harmful. We need culturally centered neighborhoods, parks, business districts and arts and culture that celebrate communities of color in Richmond. These things will make our city rich and attractive to visitors but also more home to those who live here. We need to make sure that 50% of Black and brown people can stay here and call it home.

I am advocating for investing in existing communities of color, not as the only viable option, but a key effort worth investing in. We are systemically set up for the disparate racial results that we achieve. So, we must systematize Black and brown prosperity, write it into our policies, programs and our neighborhood development efforts, not just move people around. Jackson Ward was racially segregated, but had income diversity that contributed to its thriving legacy. We can also have integrated neighborhoods that are culturally centered, but we must work towards income AND racial diversity. And even then, we must be still be vigilant, as the racial bias of whites in mixed-race thriving neighborhoods can still have a negative impact, especially on Black boys, because the underlying issue we must address is racism.

We are systemically set up for the disparate racial results that we achieve. So, we must systematize Black and brown prosperity, write it into our policies, programs and our neighborhood development efforts, not just move people around.

Support Black & Brown Ownership & Entrepreneurship

We know the key to prosperity in this country is wealth creation, which is connected to ownership – of land, capital and capacity to leverage resources. Thus, in order to catalyze communities of color in this generation and the next, we should focus on ownership of these resources. A more equitable Richmond would increase the homeownership opportunities as well as business ownership and entrepreneurship of Black and brown folk in the city. A recent PolicyLink report focused on COVID-19 recovery in cities, suggests creating a Community Reparations Program that supports Black homeownership. Evansville, Illinois, established a Restorative Housing Program fund to provide Black residents with $25,000 grants for homeownership as a form of reparations for housing discrimination via racist zoning in place from 1919 to 1969. In July 2020, Asheville, North Carolina, began establishing a program focusing on redressing the harms of its urban renewal program in the 1960s and 1970s. Recognizing the significant and irreparable harms to Black residents created by past city policies, many other cities are considering local reparations programs. Richmond should as well, in addition to collaborations with nonprofits and private industry to support and bolster Black Homeownership, helping new homeowners and stabilizing existing homeowners.

That same PolicyLink report suggests cities create "inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems"—comprehensive systems of business support to help people of color start and scale up businesses. The Nowak Metro Finance Lab describes five key approaches 1) Providing entrepreneurial support through intermediaries that effectively serve business

owners of color; 2) Increasing access to capital through new products and community navigators; 3) Expand supplier diversity by building the capacity of subcontractors and connect purchasers to vendors; 4) Strengthening commercial corridors in communities of color; and 5) Growing and diversifying sectors through targeted efforts to support and scale people-of-color-owned businesses in growing, higher paying sectors.

Additionally, programs like Buy the Block (a crowdsourcing platform to support local businesses) can also help longstanding Black businesses stay in the neighborhoods and acquire the buildings their businesses inhabit. I live near Brookland Park Boulevard, a haven for both Black-owned businesses but also gentrification. As the market gets hotter, those long standing businesses will be vulnerable to push out. Business programs that support property ownership will be key to stabilizing Black business, which equates to ownership and wealth.

This emphasis on supporting Black and brown centered identity, community building and ownership opportunities may seem extreme to equity skeptics, but what we have experienced for the past 400 years is privileging and centering whiteness in both our racist and race neutral policies from federal to local policies, to the private market. To counteract that legacy, we need to work harder to invest in marginalized communities of color – from a placemaking, neighborhood planning and economic development perspective. We must start now, unmasking racism in ourselves, our communities and institutions, unlearning it's ways and tricks and being midwives to the new equitable Richmond that is waiting to be born.

Ebony Walden

Ebony is the Founder and Principal Consultant at Ebony Walden Consulting (EWC), an urban strategy firm based in Richmond, Virginia. At EWC, she works with a wide range of organizations to design and facilitate meetings, trainings, strategic plans and community engagement processes that explore race, equity and the creation of more just and inclusive communities. Before founding EWC, Ebony worked in local government and for non-profit organizations dedicated to citywide and neighborhood level revitalization. Currently, Ebony is an adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University where she teaches Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the City. She holds a Masters in Urban and Environmental Planning from the University of Virginia and a Bachelors in Business Administration from Georgetown University.

Ebony's work has been featured in The Hill, Richmond Times-Dispatch and The Nature of Cities.

Expanding the Geography of Opportunity and Ownership

MARITZA E. MERCADO PECHIN, AICP
City of Richmond, Office of Equitable Development

I grew up as the only child of my single-mother, Lydia Mercado. I had a complicated relationship with my biological father, Dimiter Gorchev, who was 23 years older than my mother. Dimiter struggled to connect with me, his Puerto Rican daughter who grew up in the 1980s/90s in San Juan, Puerto Rico and Newton, Massachusetts. Dimiter grew up in Sophia, Bulgaria in the 1930s/40s. He served time in a Stalin work camp, and orchestrated our family's dramatic escape from communism, which even included hidden compartments in car floors.

The man I call "dad" is Lou Jones, who has been in a relationship with my mother since I was in 3rd grade. Lou is the grandfather to my children and the predominant male figure in my life. Lou is a professional photographer who taught me how to tell visual stories by framing the world through a camera lens and the value of great penmanship.

When Lou came to visit my husband and me in Richmond in 2012, he looked uncomfortable. I prodded him on what was up. Did I say something? Was he mad? Aside from being an expert photographer, Lou is a fantastic storyteller who captivates audiences with tales of his travels and experiences. But Lou seemed off on his visit. Then he told me a story, and as expected, it was a captivating recount of his experiences in Richmond as a boy and it went something like this:

> *"As a kid, I spent the summers in Hanover where I would hang out with my aunt and cousins. I would accompany my aunt to deliver eggs to the cafeterias of department stores in Downtown Richmond. I remember traveling on the bus to deliver eggs. I remember needing to go to the bathroom but refusing to do so because I didn't want to go to the colored bathrooms, because in D.C., where I lived, we didn't have "colored bathrooms" and "white bathrooms," we just had "bathrooms." As a boy, I couldn't voice that sense of fear to my aunt, so I just held my pee all the way back to Hanover. Decades later, I came to Richmond as an accomplished professional photographer to photograph Douglas Wilder, and I pissed all over Richmond."*

My dad is Black. When Lou says the "I pissed all over Richmond" part of that story, he says it was a sneer on his lips and smile in his eyes. Richmond traumatized Lou as a child and the memory of this city is profoundly negative for Lou.

That day in 2012, Lou told me that he only came to Richmond to visit me, but otherwise, would never want to set foot in the city. He does not feel like Richmond is a place that welcomes people with his skin color. This was coming from a man who has lived in Boston for over 50 years, a city that has had its fair share of racial discrimination.

As time passed, and my years as a Richmond resident increased, I realized that every single time Lou comes to visit me, his visit is a profound act of love—one where he sets aside his childhood wound in order to spend time with us.

So here's where we come back to my mom. My mom is a city planner. Throughout her career (she is retired now), Lydia worked on transformative projects that profoundly changed how places function. She worked on Boston's Big Dig (major multi-billion dollar that converted an elevated highway into a tunnel with a park on top), the Southwest Corridor (park on top of a submerged train to reconnect the South End and Back Bay in Boston), Boston's Mission

Expanding the Geography of Opportunity and Ownership

I find urgency to do this work because I want Richmond to show the world that the former Capital of the Confederacy can be reborn as the Capital of Reconciliation and Equity.

Hill public housing redevelopment, and TrenUrbano (a new subway line in San Juan). As I have grown up, I have seen how the long-term planning projects she worked on led to the complete reformation of entire parts of Boston and San Juan.

I entered the city planning field because I want to help create better places for all people to thrive. Locally, in Richmond, my work has centered on creating *Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth*, the new citywide Master Plan that charts a path to design a more equitable, sustainable, and beautiful Richmond on its 300th birthday in 2037. I find urgency to do this work because I want Richmond to show the world that the former Capital of the Confederacy can be reborn as the Capital of Reconciliation and Equity. But more personally, I am driven to do this work, because I want Lou to feel welcome and included in this city that I have come to love.

As defined in *Richmond 300*, an equitable Richmond is a city where all Richmonders have equal or equivalent access to goods, services, status, rights, power, and amenities. From my perspective as an urban planner focused on the built environment, "access" has a physical component as well as an ownership component. Physically, we need to expand the geography of opportunity for traditionally marginalized-Richmonders (low-income individuals, Latinos, Blacks) to live and work near daily essential services, like parks, grocery stores, childcare, schools, health care, and more, without having to spend a lot of time traveling to get to those daily needs. In terms of ownership, we need to ensure that communities that were intentionally left out of wealth building opportunities have priority access to own property, businesses, and process. I have 4 ideas that I think I can help Richmond expand physical and ownership access.

Rewrite the zoning ordinance: One tool for increasing access is through the zoning ordinance. The zoning ordinance is a legal document that outlines what property owners may build on their land and how the building and site must be designed. In 1911, Richmond passed a race-based zoning ordinance, which was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court as unconstitutional in 1917. In 2020, the passage of the *Richmond 300* plan called for rewriting the zoning ordinance. The rewrite of the ordinance must be approached with a view to expand the geography of opportunity for all people, regardless of race and income, to live and work throughout the city. The ordinance rewrite could expand housing options by-right along and near major roads to include a combination of multi-family housing, duplexes, small-lot residential, and accessory dwelling units. The ordinance rewrite could look to allow more mixed-use development by-right so that development can include retail, services, and offices near and along major roads to make it easier for Richmonders to travel between their homes, work, and daily essential needs.

Reconnect the city: Just as major infrastructure projects destroyed strong Black communities, intentional and community-driven infrastructure projects can reknit Black neighborhoods and expand connectivity to new areas of town. A decking of the I-95/I-64 with parks, paths, streets, and buildings to reconnect Jackson Ward to Gilpin Court can unleash a major flourishing of both communities as they are physically reunited. This would just be the beginning of reknitting communities that are cut off by infrastructure—other parts of Richmond that could be reconnected include reconnecting Historic Fulton to Chimborazo Park and reconnecting Randolph to the Fan.

Expanding the Geography of Opportunity and Ownership

Jackson Ward Bridge Deck. By capping the highway between Jackson Ward and North Jackson Ward with streets, parks, and buildings, Jackson Ward will once again be one neighborhood. Credit Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth.

Establish programs that increase generational wealth: Another tool to increase access is to intentionally shape programs that increase the wealth of Black households by seeking to undo the wrongs committed by racist zoning, blockbusting, deed covenants, and red lining. This is where the private and philanthropic sectors need to assist. The City government is limited in its legal abilities to create grant or loan programs that specifically create opportunities for Black homeowners or business owners because doing so may be considered unconstitutional for giving preference based on race. Private and philanthropic groups need to create forgivable loans or provide grants to assist Black homeowners with home repairs, to capitalize Black-owned businesses, and to increase the capacity of Black-led non-profits.

Expand engagement and education of city planning: Since Jane Jacobs published her famous missive, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* in 1961, the city planning field has become increasingly focused on developing community-driven plans to attempt to solve enormous problems, like concentrated poverty, environmental degradation, and more. The process and planning to solve huge problems in our built environment requires time, capacity, and dedication. Many groups that traditionally do not engage in planning processes love their communities and have great ideas for how to address the problems in their space—but they lack the time and capacity to dedicate to a community-driven solution. Everyone in Richmond must play a role in shaping the city, beyond those with city planner titles. There are a few ways to expand education and engagement in city planning, particularly focused on groups that are traditionally not well-represented in community planning efforts:

- Pay community members within traditionally-underrepresented groups to help reach their community members and engage them in planning efforts.

- Provide childcare and food at community meetings and provide myriad ways to give input in person, online, via text, etc.
- Teach high school and college students about city planning and encourage them to enter the profession.
- Create a community planning workshop program for Richmonders to learn more about city planning.
- Establish a university fellowship program for community members to audit planning courses for one year to learn about planning and bring back ideas to their community.

Conclusion

As a professional photographer, Lou taught me how to tell stories through written, oral, and visual methods. As a city planner, my mom taught me that implementing big initiatives—like rewriting the zoning ordinance and decking highways—is a long-term game that requires a groundswell of support and significant financial commitments. The projects my mom worked on took 10 to over 30 years to complete from idea to completion. The Big Dig in Boston was an idea that took thousands of people, billions of dollars to complete, and resulted in the complete transformation of Downtown Boston. The Mission Hill public housing redevelopment transformed an area of concentrated poverty into a mixed-income community. Each one of these projects transformed the city and took a long time and many resources to develop. The same will be true for Richmond.

The four ideas I presented here are two ways to expand the geography of opportunity through zoning and infrastructure and two ways to expand ownership in land, businesses, and process. These ideas can begin to transform Richmond into a place where people with traumatic memories of this city can begin to heal and find space in the city. Richmond can work together to create a more equitable city—we just need lots of support, financial investment, and patience, a whole lot of patience, because the work of physically transforming a city takes time.

Maritza E. Mercado Pechin, AICP

Maritza E. Mercado Pechin, AICP is a Deputy Director with the City of Richmond, Virginia where she is leading the Office of Equitable Development, which is focused on working laterally across City Departments and with the Richmond community to create a more equitable, sustainable, and beautiful Richmond. Originally from Puerto Rico, Maritza grew up in Massachusetts and Puerto Rico. She earned an AB in Government from Harvard College and a Masters in City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania. Maritza and her family live in Battery Park in Richmond. She has lived in Richmond for 10 years, which is the longest she has ever lived anywhere.

Neighborhood Self-Determination and the Vision for Racial Equity

MICHAEL H. SMITH
Director for Community Investments and the Built Environment, Richmond Memorial Health Foundation

I'm attending a conference in Washington, D.C and it's finally lunch break. I've been inside one room all morning and this break is my first opportunity to grab a bite to eat and hopefully, sit near a window with some sun. Conference attendees are milling about, and as most breaks during conferences go, conversation with other attendees is a high likelihood. However, if you're like me, you'd much rather find a nice seat alone and scroll through email or social media. Fortunately for me, my wish doesn't come true and another attendee grabs a seat across from me. He immediately jumps into conversation. He's a seasoned community organizer out of New York City, with experience globally and domestically. We exchange introductions and he proceeds to ask, "So, what brings you to this work?" Given we're at a conference focused on public housing and resident organizing, I give a response related to this subject-matter:

> *"I'm interested in dismantling structural racism in housing policy and preserving housing for existing residents."*
>
> Unenthused with that response, he reframes his question:
>
> *"What about **you** do you bring to this work?"*
>
> I really just want to finish my lunch, but I think a bit more about his question and proceed to go into detail about my personal journey and the values I seek to carry along with me. He affirms my response, but still wants to dig deeper:
>
> *"Where do these values you carry come from?"*
>
> This lunch is not getting eaten. I begin discussing my time in different cities, my experiences in college, the town I grew up in, and the church I attended.
>
> *"That's it! That's where you first experienced this work. The church!"*

Lunch ends and the sandwich I had is barely touched. And on top of that, I'm left asking myself the rest of the day, "What does church have to do with my work in affordable housing policy?" Throughout the rest of the day, I'm reflecting on that conversation, until I finally understand what he was attempting to teach me.

Perhaps similar for some of you, the Black Baptist church was foundational to my upbringing. It was this multi-generational, familial place that shaped my understanding of the world around me. And it was also the place that unknowingly shaped my interpretation of what it means to advance racial equity in the built environment. The Black church was the first place I experienced the values that have sustained Black families and communities for generations. Values such as:

- Respect of elders;
- Solidarity in the pursuit of joy;

- Trust and love of your neighbor; and
- The determination for collective liberation.

Now, I'm not a pastor and don't intend to be, so I won't go into a sermon. I also recognize that we all have various relationships to the institution of church, so I don't necessarily assign these values solely to the institution. However, I do believe these values can serve as a guide to how we model racial equity in our methods of engagement, decision-making, and economic investment in Richmond neighborhoods.

The voices and perspectives of elders are critically important. Without their stories, their traditions, and their guidance, our work isn't adequately rooted.

Respect of Elders

Essential to building an equitable city is the understanding of what inequities your city is seeking to address. Yes, investing in well-researched analyses of these inequities is important, but if these analyses are not fully understood and embraced by those who have experienced these inequities first-hand, the work of achieving real equity falls short. That's why the voices and perspectives of elders are critically important. Without their stories, their traditions, and their guidance, our work isn't adequately rooted. And in a city like Richmond, where the Black population decreased 7% from 2000-2016, the opportunity to capture and build upon these voices is slipping by.

How do we embody respect when engaging our elders in a neighborhood planning process? What opportunities do we have to strengthen intergenerational learning and collaboration? One example I think of is the community planning process implemented in the Hill District neighborhood of Pittsburgh by the Neighborhood Resilience Project (formerly known as FOCUS Pittsburgh). I was fortunate to work in the Hill District during this time and to this day, this particular planning process remains the most respectful, healing, and democratized planning I've ever witnessed. The planning work focused on one particular block—2900 block of Webster Avenue—and included all residents and institutions that called that block home. Many of the residents were older and were either born in the Hill District, or had raised their families there. With such a rich and nuanced perspective on the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for the Hill District, gathering their input during this process required something often not endorsed in the work of planning and developing a community: patience. Patience meant spending time on the front-end building trust and communion, independent of a particular outcome. Sometimes patience meant suspending roles and titles, allowing the space to be free of real and perceived hierarchy. And crucially, patience meant allowing the process to evolve naturally, providing residents the time to follow their own path towards a sense of ownership and trust of the process. And in the end, the members of that community unveiled their plan in one of the most inspiring community meetings I've been fortunate to be part of. The sense of pride amongst their block was palpable.

This work of engaging our elders is not only possible in Richmond, but imperative.

Solidarity in the Pursuit of Joy

As Audre Lorde famously quoted, "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." Consider the many identities you may hold. Perhaps you identify as African American, but also identify as a Trans youth. Perhaps you identify as a Black woman, but also a Black woman that is elderly and physically disabled. These complexities exist in all our neighborhoods and it's the complexity that makes our neighborhoods

as vibrant as they are. However, when we work to advance racial equity in neighborhood planning, how do these complexities get represented? For example, when we talk about expanding access to affordable housing in our neighborhoods, are we considering the accessibility of housing for Trans youth in our community? Or the accessibility of housing for renters with children and disabilities? Patient, deliberate community engagement allows us to uncover these complexities and truly build solidarity in our work of advancing racial equity. Thankfully, we have models existing in Richmond in which to build from. Models such as the Youth Empowerment Through Eviction Research (YEER) Initiative developed collaboratively by Advocates for Richmond Youth, Six Points Innovation Center, Virginia Community Voice, RVA Eviction Lab, VCU School of Social Work, and VCU L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. Informed, led, and shaped by youth throughout Richmond, this initiative exemplified intersectionality and put into practice the work of building solidarity across different identities, particularly in the context of housing justice. **Building a more equitable Richmond will require our full, complex selves to show up securely, and this initiative presents a model in which to build from in the neighborhoods we work within.**

Trust and Love of Your Neighbor

"Turn to the person next to you and say neighbor…" If like me, you've heard that phrase hundreds of times growing up in the Black church. Yet, it was this past year of the pandemic where this phrase became increasingly significant outside of the church, with many of us looking to our neighbors for either emotional or material support. In Richmond, we saw countless examples of that support, from grassroots organizations in Gilpin Court to institutions such as the Richmond City Health District and their neighborhood resource centers. But as we build from COVID-19 and seek to retain the practices of mutual aid that were so vital during the past year, how do we leverage these practices to inform our conversations regarding essential neighborhood-serving organizations? As noted earlier, Richmond's racial composition is shifting. According to Richmond 300 and The Partnership for Housing Affordability's Locality Data, in 2000, Black residents made up 57% of the City of Richmond's population, compared to 38% for White residents. Fast forward to 2016, and the Black and white population of Richmond sits at 47% and 46%, respectively. Additionally, home sale prices in the City of Richmond are increasing faster than anywhere else in the region, with the average home being 56% more expensive than it was in 2009. These high home sale prices are disproportionately impacting Black homeowners, specifically in historic Black neighborhoods such as Jackson Ward and Church Hill. In 2017, estimates showed that the City of Richmond had lost 3,600 black homeowners since 2000.

Market volatility within neighborhoods can have a myriad of health-related impacts on existing residents. Retaining trust amongst neighbors is vital to successful neighborhood engagement and development. It requires a trusted neighborhood-based institution focused on carrying out the vision of the residents in which it serves. Organizations such as Southside Community Development and Housing Corporation (SCDHC) have been serving that role for families in South Side Richmond since 1998. In subsequent years, SCDHC has seen the impact institutions such as theirs can have in sustaining and building trust within its community. Therefore, as we build beyond COVID-19 and embed practices of mutual aid in our approach to racial equity, SCDHC asks a critical question: Where are all the Black community development corporations?

Determination for Collective Liberation

Freedom Corner marks the spot in which Hill District residents organized and stood their ground against the demoralizing and destabilizing forces of urban renewal. Already reeling from the loss of 8,000 residents due to the demolition of their Lower Hill community, the members of the Hill District could endure no more and demanded no more demolition come into their neighborhood. Freedom Corner not only stands as a physical representation of resistance and determination, but a symbol for political strength and will for a neighborhood rich in pride.

Neighborhood Self-Determination and the Vision for Racial Equity

Here in Richmond, we have our own standard for neighborhood self-determination: Jackson Ward. Well-known for its role creating Black economic sovereignty and wealth, particularly via Maggie L. Walker, Jackson Ward also stands as a neighborhood that has fought consistently since Reconstruction against state-sanctioned discrimination and disenfranchisement. Although Jackson Ward has undergone significant demographic changes, the roots of Black political, economic, and social capital still exist. Currently, these roots are being tended to by new initiatives such as The JXN Project. The work of the JXN Project to honor untold and overlooked truths of Jackson Ward reinforces our interpretation of what Black self-determination and agency means in our city. Through the enhancement of context and narrative, the JXN Project presents a new framework of dialogue to build upon. What will we do with this opportunity? **Will we honor the legacy of Jackson Ward through ceremonial acts, or will we allow this legacy to live its fullest expression, informing the principles of engagement, planning, and investment in neighborhoods throughout the entire city?**

Conclusion

Racial equity does not seek to dominate, alienate, or perpetuate social displacement. It isn't rooted in scarcity, nor does it seek to compete. At its core, racial equity discerns, reflects, and leans upon the wisdom of those that have come before. This, I believe, is what Richmond neighborhoods desire in the work to advance racial equity. A desire to listen to the wisdom of those who've walked this path before; a desire to be joyful in the full expression of themselves; a desire to know there are neighborhood-based organizations looking out for their well-being; and a desire to know their voices are what's guiding the future of their neighborhoods.

Let's give ourselves the opportunity to lead. Let's give ourselves the opportunity to model how a globally recognized city with a history in enslavement and the Confederacy heals and repairs. And let's model these principles and practices at a neighborhood level, leaning upon the wisdom of individuals and institutions that have yet to see these ideals fully materialize.

Michael H. Smith, AICP

Michael H. Smith, AICP, serves as Director for Community Investments and the Built Environment at the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation (RMHF). In this role, Michael oversees the Foundation's work in creating community partnerships that explore and improve connections between the built environment and improved health outcomes in the Richmond region. His duties include leading the Foundation's education, policy and outreach work with regard to the built environment; overseeing strategy and grantmaking for this focus area; and helping to create and support financial investments in the built environment.

Prior to joining RMHF, Michael led real estate development and urban planning work in the nonprofit, government and private sectors in Pittsburgh, PA. Most recently, Michael served as Project Manager for TREK Development Group, managing the Bedford Dwellings/Hill District Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant. Prior to that role, Michael worked in the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, managing the city's affordable housing task force. Michael came to Pittsburgh after working for four years in Charlottesville as a neighborhood planner.

Michael completed a Bachelor's Degree in Urban and Environmental Planning from the University of Virginia. He is a member of the American Planning Association, the Neighborhood Funders Group, and serves on the Community Advisory Board of Virginia Public Media.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Black and Brown Centered Placemaking Rooted in Identity and Ownership

EBONY WALDEN

To create a racially equitable Richmond that is absent of starkly visible differences between the mostly Black and brown communities in the East End, North Side and South Side—and those neighborhoods in the wealthier and whiter West End, we must:

- Create communities rooted in Black and brown cultural identity and excellence.
- Support Black and brown property ownership and entrepreneurship.

Expanding the Geography of Opportunity and Ownership

MARITZA E. MERCADO PECHIN

Richmond can work together to create a more equitable city through the following strategies:

- Rewriting the zoning ordinance to provide more use options.
- Reconnecting the city: intentional and community-driven infrastructure projects can reknit Black neighborhoods and expand connectivity to new areas of town.
- Establishing programs that increase generational wealth.
- Expanding engagement and education of city planning.

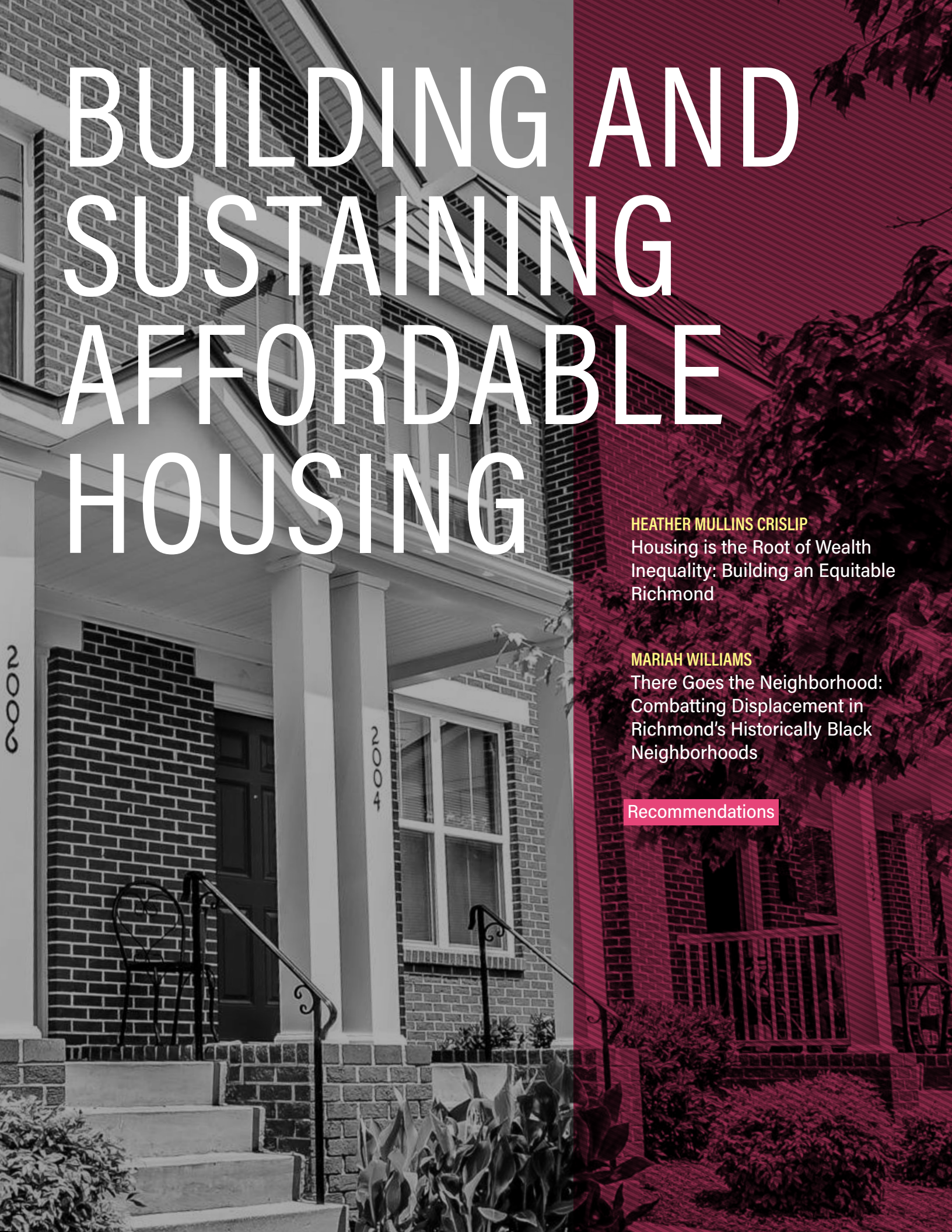
Neighborhood Self-Determination and the Vision for Racial Equity

MICHAEL H. SMITH

These values can serve as a guide to how we model racial equity in our methods of engagement, decision-making, and economic investment in Richmond neighborhoods:

- Respect of elders;
- Solidarity in the pursuit of joy;
- Trust and love of your neighbor; and
- The determination for collective liberation.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Housing is the Root of Wealth Inequality: Building an Equitable Richmond

HEATHER MULLINS CRISLIP
Former President and CEO, Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia

In April of 2018, Richmond received a rude wake up call. We were called out on the front page of the New York Times for chronically tolerating the second highest eviction rate in the country, over 4 times the national average. Even today, in 2021, thirty percent of renters in the City of Richmond get an eviction notice on their door *every year*. These renters are overwhelmingly Black, female, and heads of households. This is a shameful, cruel, systemic problem, but it is the tip of the iceberg, demonstrating deep substantial differences in housing that limit the opportunities of families and hold our entire community back from shared prosperity.

We all intuit, if only indirectly, that the cycle of poverty is firmly centered on housing and where you live. It impacts every other aspect of one's life, framing one's life expectations and opportunities, but also their access to jobs, healthy food, and exercise. Differing housing opportunities and systemic inequities are the foundation of wealth inequality in Richmond and the U.S. at large. If we can address these life-altering issues, we will build an equitable, thriving community where we all benefit from the work, creativity, and vibrancy of every citizen.

The dismal precariousness of the rental market is alarming, but it's not the whole picture of the differences in housing opportunities. Virginia has a 25% gap in the rate of homeownership between white and Black households (non-Hispanic white households at 73% and African Americans at 48% in 2019). Homeownership is the way in which Americans build wealth and security. Owning a home is the mechanism to send your kids to college, or leverage equity to start a small business, or have resources to retire comfortably. Owning your home provides security to allow people to prosper. There are societal conversations positing that we should not use housing as our primary wealth-building mechanism, but the reality for low- and middle-income households is that it is the most reliable and accessible way to do so.

The dramatic differences in homeownership that undermine Black wealth are not largely a function of income, as many often assume. There are structural barriers, both historic and contemporary, that deliver this result.

In recent years, our community has become much more aware of the history and impact of redlining in U.S. cities, Richmond being prominent among them. Redlining is a discriminatory practice by which insurance companies, banks and other institutions deny services to residents based on the racial or ethnic composition of their neighborhoods. Historically, these practices were designed by the predecessor of the Federal Housing Administration denying mortgage underwriting to Black neighborhoods across America by drawing literal red lines on maps and declaring minority or transitioning neighborhoods to be a poor credit risk for public mortgage underwriting, regardless of their economic profile. In Richmond, this meant that if you wished to purchase a home in Jackson Ward, a wealthy Black neighborhood coined "Black Wall Street of the South," you would be unable to get a newly available 30 year mortgage to do so. This had devastating impacts on thriving neighborhoods that limited the appeal of homes that could not be financed and thus were not invested in. The gulf in value between properties that could be financed and those that could not began the cycle of undervaluing properties in Black neighborhoods that still gives us dramatic differences in property values between Black and white neighborhoods today. At the same time, redlined neighborhoods became home to all public housing developed in Richmond. Both systems were

underwritten with public dollars, but public underwriting delivered private wealth leveraged into life opportunities in white neighborhoods, and public housing does not.

In the modern era, redlining is more subtle but still present. Banks and Insurance companies target their products based on their perceived risk for the areas, which often is not based on tangible business reasons but perceptions of the value of those living in the neighborhood. Mainline institutions such as banks and insurance companies have fled Black neighborhoods and left them with inferior financial options. Ask yourself where in Richmond you see reputable bank branches and where you see check cashing facilities with exploitative terms?

Black neighborhoods have also seen sophisticated efforts to strip wealth through inferior financial products in recent years. Predatory lending can be referred to as "Reverse Redlining" when predatory financial products are targeted to Black neighborhoods. In Richmond, according to publicly available mortgage data, from 2004 to 2011, 107,000 home mortgages originated for owner occupied home purchases of 1-4 units in the Richmond region. Of these, 12 percent, or almost 13,000 were considered subprime. Comparing these loans against the minority composition of the neighborhoods in which they were made reveals a startling disparity. Subprime loans accounted for just 5 percent of the total number of loans made in neighborhoods having less than a 20 percent minority population. In contrast, subprime loans constituted 31 percent of the total number of loans in neighborhoods having greater than 20 percent minority population. Nationally, the Center for Responsible Lending found that even after considering individual credit scores and other characteristics, Hispanic and African American borrowers were more than 30% more likely to receive higher-rate subprime loans.

The first step in this would be to have housing available that people can afford, distributed across the region to allow for choice, and opportunities for sustainable homeownership.

Loan Products Were Irresponsible, Not Consumers

Many people perceive the foreclosure crisis as being a function of people who took subprime loans who would not have qualified for regular credit and found themselves in an unsustainable position, having purchased more than they could afford. This is not the case, the vast majority of those who received subprime loans were for refinance, not purchase, which suggests purely exploitative and predatory objectives. It is the loan products, not the borrowers, that were unsustainable. The result was a foreclosure crisis that hit Richmond very hard. Prior to the crisis, the North Side of Richmond had the highest rates of African American homeownership, and the foreclosures experienced during the last decade mean that we now have the same gap in homeownership that existed when the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968.

An equitable Richmond would give all households the opportunity for stability and growth. The first step in this would be to have housing available that people can afford, distributed across the region to allow for choice, and opportunities for sustainable homeownership. A thriving Richmond would also break down racial and economic segregated housing patterns to create an integrated community. These problems are not intractable; public policy and business practices created them, and public attention and accountability can solve them.

Align our Housing Stock with Our Incomes

In Richmond, like in much of America, our housing stock and choices do not line up with our incomes. This is our community's challenge, not a failure of individuals to make responsible choices. In Richmond, 50% of

renters spend more than 30% of their income on rent (and nearly 20% of renters spend more than 50% of their income on rent). This is because less expensive units are just not available, not because half of renters have chosen to be cost burdened. The pandemic has worsened the squeeze on affordable units as middle-income households have sought out more-affordable units and now compete for those units as well. When we see a sad housing story of a family being displaced, we should realize that almost always, it is a story of our community's failure, and not poor choices of individuals.

Build More Affordable Units for Homeownership

We have to open up homeownership opportunities and build units accessible to the half of us who make less than the average income of the region. At Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, we have seen a dramatic shortage of units affordable to first time homebuyers escalate even more rapidly in recent years. We must figure out how to have affordable housing integrated through our community to give households a place to start. This can be achieved through inclusionary zoning (requiring affordable units to be developed in new developments), subsidies for development, or other public policy efforts.

Affordable Housing Should be Available in *Every* Neighborhood

We must build affordable rental units in every neighborhood and community so that workers can live where they work and there is true choice in schools and communities. Our region has a distinct disconnect between where affordable housing is located and where entry-level jobs are, creating a logistical difficulty for our most vulnerable families. This means more affordable rental units in our suburbs, and purposefully making sure that every community is mixed-income. The connection of our segregated housing patterns and our segregated schools would mean that living together will mean we educate our kids together and prepare them for life in an integrated, equitable American society.

Housing underpins all other aspects of a person's life, it determines where our kids go to school, what jobs we can access, what grocery stores and food are available to us, what banks serve us, and whether there are safe outdoor and recreation assets that we can access. It is critically important that Richmond works to address housing inequity in rental and homeownership so that we can build communities that live, work, and play together. Our segregated society was purposefully created through the action of the government, the private market and individuals, and we can overcome the weight of that history with action and attention from the same.

Heather Mullins Crislip

Heather Mullins Crislip served as President & CEO of HOME from 2012–2021. Heather holds a BA in Economics and Political Science from the University of Mary Washington and a JD from the University of Connecticut School of Law. Returning to Virginia in 2009, Heather oversaw the bipartisan policy projects for the Miller Center at the University of Virginia for former Governor, Gerald Baliles. She also served as the Staff Director of the Goode National Transportation Policy Project, and did significant policy work on Higher Education, among other areas. At HOME, she oversaw major systemic investigations and fair housing enforcement actions; established two new housing counseling programs (Mobility Counseling and Eviction Diversion) and deployed HOME's capacity for research for advancement in housing policy. Currently, she serves as Rector of the University of Mary Washington. She has been admitted by examination to the State Bars of Connecticut, Hawaii, and Virginia.

There Goes the Neighborhood: Combatting Displacement in Richmond's Historically Black Neighborhoods

MARIAH WILLIAMS
Urban Planner, Strategic Housing Officer of Equitable Development, Virginia Housing

There Goes the Neighborhood

I grew up in the old Harlem, New York. Where the hot summers would bring the kids outside to run through the fire hydrants that we turned into sprinklers, stoops and railings became the porches that we didn't have, and the corner store was our very own Walmart of snacks. 125th street, home of the famous Apollo Theater, was the place to get bootleg CDs and DVDs, and the latest Air Force One sneakers.

I had the opportunity to traverse many cultural spaces by way of being a smart Black kid from the hood, but even after the long days of summer camps and evenings of violin lessons on the lower east side, nothing felt quite like home as much as the 1.4 square miles of my Black, Harlem community.

In the summer of 2017, Wholefoods came to Harlem, right on 125th street and just a few avenues away from the Apollo. And well, there went the neighborhood. Its arrival was indicative of a different Harlem. Up until then, Harlem felt impenetrable to processes I would later learn about as an urban planner - gentrification and displacement and the inner workings of policies that drove them.

The change that engulfed Harlem is part of a national trend in gentrifying legacy Black cities and neighborhoods across the country—wealthy, white families are moving to non-white, predominantly Black neighborhoods. According to the New York Times, since the year 2000, white residents moving to non-white communities has affected about one in six predominantly African-American census tracts. Inner cities and downtown centers once plagued by disinvestment, to which minorities were relegated, are attracting new development. The insidious nature of the changes happening in communities like Harlem is not simply the emergence of more white faces on Harlem's streets or the newly built bike lanes. The changes symbolize renewed interest in communities that have long fought for the very resources and amenities that new residents can now access so easily. They also symbolize an erasure of the very Blackness and cultural and social norms that created such a dynamic community.

The sudden interest in Black communities across the country is not, in fact, a sudden process. While the demographic shifts suggest a pattern of individual, white households choosing to move to historically Black and disinvested neighborhoods to spur gentrification and eventually displacement, their accomplices include housing policies that both encourage and intensify changes in these Black communities. The gentrification process and the displacement it incites perpetuates patterns of injustice as Black communities are erased, removed from the fabric of reinvested communities, and priced out of the very neighborhoods that once offered affordability**.** These injustices are deeply rooted in the United States' long history of intentional disinvestment in Black communities and other communities of color. This disinvestment was aided by federal, state, and local housing policies throughout the country, beginning in the early 20th century. This included practices such as redlining, blockbusting, urban renewal and highway construction, to name a few - the culmination of these interventions disseminated Black neighborhoods throughout the county. Richmond's Black communities were no exception.

There Goes the Neighborhood: Combatting Displacement in Richmond's Historically Black Neighborhoods

As the city of Richmond undergoes significant transition, **achieving racial equity means implementing policies to combat involuntary displacement of Black residents and to preserve the culture embedded within historic Black communities.**

Neighborhood Change in the City of Richmond

In Richmond, gentrification has been pretty significant in neighborhoods such as Jackson Ward, Church Hill, and more recently, the city's North Side. As each of these neighborhoods have undergone gentrification, both physical and cultural displacement have occurred. This year, Jackson Ward celebrated its 150th anniversary, which prompted reflections on the changes that the neighborhood has undergone over the last century and how it has endured after decades of forcible displacement of its Black residents.

What does it mean for a neighborhood, once known as the Harlem of the South, to have transformed to a majority white community, where African-Americans only comprise about 23% of the population? Or when long time residents are forced to move and are replaced by new and younger ones? History and culture is lost, and we lose the benefit of not only learning about the history of a community from those who lived there, but we risk the history being lost altogether if we do not continuously highlight the historical narratives and markers of its Black culture. Trailblazers such as Maggie Lena Walker and Oliver Hill, who helped make the neighborhood such a staple in Richmond's Black community, are not just figures of the past. Their legacy can remain even as the community transforms and can even light our path forward.

As the city of Richmond undergoes significant transition, achieving racial equity means implementing policies to combat involuntary displacement of Black residents and to preserve the culture embedded within historic Black communities.

Church Hill is yet another example of a neighborhood where demographic shifts mirror those happening in historically disinvestment communities throughout the city. Church Hill is one of Richmond's oldest neighborhoods. Beginning in the late 1950s, the neighborhood experienced significant decline. Development and housing policies gave way to white flight, leaving behind low-income African-Americans to experience decades of disinvestment. That has since changed. Between 2000-2010, the neighborhood began to attract a whiter and more educated population. By 2015, African American households, both renters and homeowners, had declined by 20 percent, after comprising almost 90 percent of households in 2000. Even more striking, in this same period, Black homeowners in Church Hill declined by 23 percent, while white homeowners increased by 159 percent. Home values have grown at the same speed as white folks in the neighborhood. In just 4 years, between 2010-2014, home values increased by 30 percent, from a median sale price of $165,000 to $215,000 by 2014.

These changes in the demographic make-up of the community should have prompted decision-makers, elected officials, and policymakers to take a closer look at the policies driving such drastic change in the community and attracting residents so unlike the existing ones.

The demographic and housing market shifts are compounded by a contentious cultural shift, a shift that the preservation of Black businesses have been crucial in curtailing. Brookland Park Boulevard, located in Richmond's North Side and first streetcar suburb, once served as the physical demarcation of white and Black residents in

the neighborhood. Similar to Church Hill, the North Side's housing market is undergoing significant change and attracting a demographic that was once foreign to the community. However, the presence of Black businesses along this main commercial corridor has been key to the neighborhood maintaining its cultural footprint. These businesses reflect a commitment to making sure that Black culture and families are reflected even as the community changes. More importantly, the types of businesses matter: restaurants, Black hair salons and barbershops, which in the Black community are of great significance. They have long offered respite for us, serving as gathering spaces to discuss politics, culture, and social issues.

The presence of Black businesses along this main commercial corridor has been key to the neighborhood maintaining its cultural footprint.

Mobility vs. Displacement

As difficult as it may be, change is a fact of life. Neighborhoods change, and the people within those neighborhoods change as personal and economic factors drive them to move out of one community and into another. I, for one, have moved countless times in my life. For jobs, for school, or simply out of a desire to be somewhere else. But, it's important to distinguish the process of this change from the havoc it wreaks on the people who have called a community home.

Nothing is as simple as being either for or against something. When I hear gentrification, I have a visceral reaction because of how I've seen it change my own community, but I know that it denotes a process, not necessarily an outcome. I do not think any Black person who has lived in an under-resourced or impoverished community is against finally getting those resources we have fought so hard for. It's about more than being against change or investment or for it, especially when that investment is long overdue. But, it is a matter of not feeling disposable, unseen, or unheard as this investment occurs; of not feeling as though the white people moving in are somehow more deserving of paved sidewalks, greenspace, bike paths and grocery stores.

I don't believe gentrification has to lead to displacement, and in fact, there are cities across the country where policy has been key to combating involuntary displacement in communities of color.

Policy got us into this, so policy has to get us out.

Creating an equitable Richmond means being intentional about promoting policies that combat involuntary displacement, ensuring that Black households truly have a choice in remaining in their communities and that they can reap the benefits of reinvestment as much as their white counterparts. This includes policies that promote stability for Black homeowners and renters in historically Black neighborhoods.

Property Tax Relief

In places like the District of Columbia and Maryland, caps on property taxes for the elderly or low-income residents, called homestead laws, ensure that they can remain in their homes even as property taxes rise due to revitalization. What if these types of laws were expanded to all homeowners, regardless of age? This might be a solution for ensuring that Black homeowners are not priced out of their homes as their communities are revitalized.

Inclusionary Zoning

Additionally, a shrinking stock of affordable housing throughout the country increases the likelihood of working class families being displaced. In the city of Richmond, a lack of affordable housing in neighborhoods that are rich in resources keeps many families from remaining in those communities. Passing and enforcing inclusionary

zoning (IZ) laws that require developers to build a certain percentage of affordable housing in new or renovated buildings or to build more housing for larger families, can help ensure that residents find affordable housing within communities of their choice. Burlington, Vermont was an early adopter of inclusionary zoning in the 1990s. As part of the IZ requirements, at least 15-20 percent of newly built housing has to meet the affordability requirements, and they have to remain affordable for up to 99 years. This policy has allowed the locality to build 270 affordable units, and while it is not a perfect system, enforcing regulations means that people can access affordable housing in changing communities.

Preservation and Celebration

While Jackson Ward still struggles with the legacy of mass displacement of Black residents, the community does provide an example of how historic preservation policies help to combat cultural displacement in legacy Black communities. For example, in 1976, Jackson Ward was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places; efforts driven by those who recognized the need to protect the community's history. In 1978, it was recognized as a National Historic Landmark, followed by two local designations in 1986. These designations are significant because they not only provide federal and local protections against significant changes to historic properties, they also symbolize a commitment and recognition from officials that this Black community is worth being preserved. More recently, projects such as The JXN Project and the Jackson Ward Collective have been created to preserve Black culture by supporting Black business owners and ensuring that they have the resources needed to thrive. These types of projects help prevent cultural and social displacement by ensuring that minority business owners are embedded in the city's economy.

Why the Moment is Now

Black people and neighborhoods have always deserved to be protected from displacement, but the recent health crisis has shown us just how tenuous our circumstances could be without the proper interventions. The COVID-19 crisis hit hard, but Black and Latino communities were hit the hardest. For those who never truly understood the implications of decades of disinvestment and racism in housing within Black communities, the health crisis revealed just how deep these inequities run. As federal eviction moratoria are lifted and forbearance programs end, state and local policies are even more important to curtailing displacement.

If racial equity is to be achieved in Black communities that have long been the epicenter for disinvestment, then as reinvestment occurs, Black households must also be able to reap the benefits of this revitalization. And being able to remain there is simply the starting point, for as neighborhoods transform, we should not be left thinking, "there goes the neighborhood."

Mariah Williams

Born and raised in Harlem, New York, Mariah Williams is an urban planner, storyteller, adjunct professor, and researcher dedicated to highlighting the experiences of Black people and spaces in cities. Her work on Black joy, Black women, and community has been featured in *Next City*, *Third Wave Urbanism* and *For Harriet*. Mariah received her B.A in Sociology from the University of Richmond and her Masters of Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Housing is the Root of Wealth Inequality: Building an Equitable Richmond

HEATHER MULLINS CRISLIP

An equitable Richmond would give all households the opportunity for stability and growth, to do this we need to:

- Align our housing stock with our incomes.
- Build more affordable units for homeownership.
- Make Affordable housing available in every neighborhood.

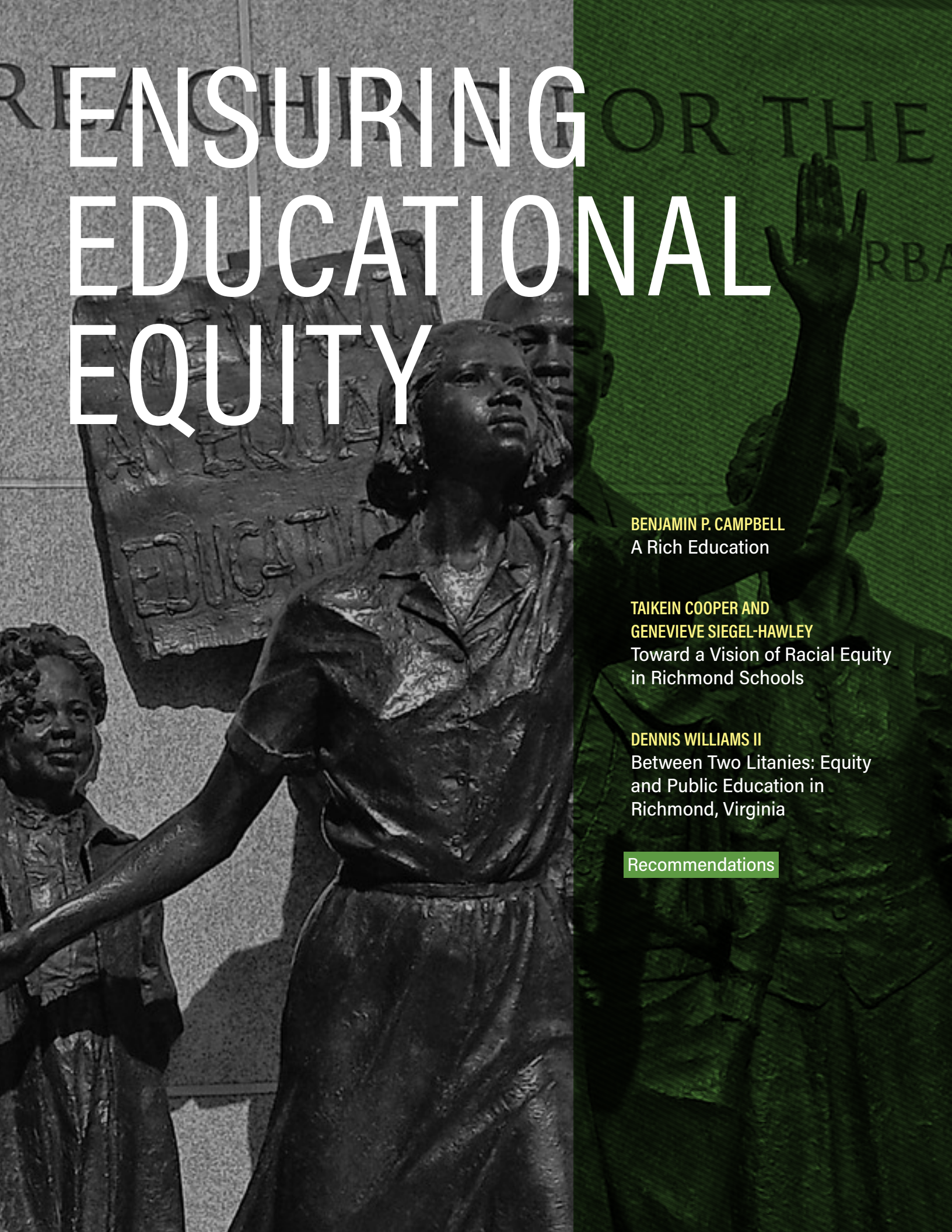
There Goes the Neighborhood: Combatting Displacement in Richmond's Historically Black Neighborhoods

MARIAH WILLIAMS

Creating an equitable Richmond means promoting policies that combat involuntary displacement, ensuring that Black households can remain in their communities and reap the benefits of reinvestment.

Strategies to promote stability for Black residents in historically Black neighborhoods include:

- Property tax relief for seniors and low-income residents.
- Inclusionary zoning that requires developers to build a certain percentage of affordable housing in new or renovated buildings.
- Preserving buildings in historically Black neighborhoods and celebrating Black culture.



ENSURING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

A Rich Education

BENJAMIN P. CAMPBELL
Pastor Emeritus, Richmond Hill; Pastoral Associate, St. Paul's Episcopal Church

My involvement with public education represents a lifetime of experience. I was seven when my mom ran for the Arlington school board. I attended the Arlington public schools. Then my dad enlisted as an attorney in the Norfolk 17 case to defeat Massive Resistance. A decade later, I arrived in Richmond the month that the Richmond Public Schools (RPS) were completely integrated for the first time.

It has always been about race in RPS and Richmond. Back then, the newspapers constantly trashed RPS. They said it was because it was a bad school system. But I knew they did it because the schools were racially integrated. Meanwhile the state helped resegregate the schools and middle class whites and Blacks fled the city. A narrative developed that these were "failing" schools. The question was, who was failing whom? It was the Commonwealth of Virginia that failed to provide the resources to insure equity. The only slightly veiled suggestion was that the teachers and children of Richmond weren't trying hard enough.

All of this time, I've been working with people in Richmond and RPS who are identifying what works and what is needed to help young people succeed. We simply don't have the resources.

My personal and professional experience, has helped me see the truth. I'm married to a former RPS teacher and we sent our four children through RPS all the way. I worked with the schools for decades. I helped to re-start Communities in Schools and establish the Micah Initiative, Armstrong Leadership Program, Armstrong Freshman Academy and the RPS Education Foundation's high school Future Centers program. All of this time, I've been working with people in Richmond and RPS who are identifying what works and what is needed to help young people succeed. We simply don't have the resources. **It has become clear that rather than face the systemic racism of policy, the state, media, and public have reverted to the centuries-old narrative—blaming failure on the underserved.** Meanwhile, the pretend "equity" of repetitive testing continues to drain the life out of both students and teachers.

The most direct route to racial equity in metropolitan Richmond is what I would call a Rich Education for all, by way of Rich Schools. The most direct route to a Rich Education for all is to double the educational wealth of African American families and children. The educational wealth provided by a Rich Education is aimed toward genuine health, wealth, literacy, interest, and human capacity. It is something no one can take from you—it serves your spirit and soul, as well as your employment and your life.

Currently, Virginia remains committed to educational inequity. African American educational wealth is under constant threat and, in some communities, barely holding its own. Since the end of Virginia's Massive Resistance in the 1960's, metropolitan Richmond's schools have been resegregated both by race and by income. The result is a Rich Education only for the affluent. Rather than changing the paradigm of the race-based educational discrimination that was developed under slavery and Jim Crow, the state has developed new practices, which reproduce, reinforce, and intensify the old inequity.

A Rich Education

The statistics are unforgiving. Education is generationally cumulative. The educational level of children, if not addressed with equity in mind, generally follows the educational level of their parents. Poverty follows educational level. And it was the policy of Virginia for nearly four centuries to determine poverty by race. Therefore,

- **If you wish to bring about racial equity, you must address poverty;**
- **If you wish to address poverty, you must address educational equity;**
- **If you wish to address educational equity, you must address educational wealth.**

A Rich Education for this generation will cut metropolitan Richmond's school-to-prison pipeline in half.

The schools of the segregated are subjected to the standards of the wealthy with the resources of the poor. A Rich Education for a person born into a low-income, racially disadvantaged household, requires 200% of the resources which are, in contrast, already present in the home and school of an upper middle income, racially advantaged household. State policy is blind to this. It is time to acknowledge this reality without embarrassment or disingenuousness, and to provide the resources necessary to make equity possible. The Commonwealth of Virginia must provide educational funding based on the income level of the students it serves.

We know a lot about what is needed for a Rich Education for students who have received the brunt of generational educational deprivation. Barbara Johns, Oliver Hill, and the warriors of the Civil Rights Movement in Virginia sought racial integration of schools so that they could guarantee a Rich Education regardless of race.

A Rich Education for this generation, beginning with pre-kindergarten, will help to equalize employment, increase home ownership, retard suburban sprawl, and break down the inherited artifacts of racial privilege. A Rich Education for this generation will cut metropolitan Richmond's school-to-prison pipeline in half. Providing Rich Schools will make racial integration less necessary—and therefore, more likely.

Schools that provide a Rich Education are tuned first of all to the social and emotional needs of students—a concentration that Virginia's State Department of Education neither encourages nor funds. They have plenty of trained counselors; intensive support from tutors; drama and sports and music programs fully funded; extra hours for enrichment. Reading and writing are taught from the beginning, in classrooms full of age-appropriate literature. A rich, integrated curriculum is present, with history, geography, social studies, and science. Classes are as small as they need to be for success. Thoughtful conversation and critical thinking abound. Advanced classes are available to all students. There are ample and proactive college and career counselors. There are summer schools and camps and school buses for exploration. There are new, spacious, encouraging facilities, with lighting on playing fields. The narrow misery of high-stakes-testing-based curriculum will be abandoned. This is the Rich Education that every parent wants for their child.

To provide the Rich Education that our children deserve, we must be rigorous in providing significantly higher pay —$10,000 to $30,000 or more per year—for the teachers who have the skill and culture to flourish in impoverished or racially concentrated environments. These salaries must be high enough so that skilled professionals without inherited wealth can afford to teach in public schools. These are the heroes of our time.

Providing a Rich Education through Rich Schools is the most fundamental responsibility of the State of Virginia. The inability to have Rich Schools is not the fault of Richmond, Petersburg or Hopewell. Advocates for Rich Schools

must address the Commonwealth of Virginia, the State Board of Education, the Governor, and the General Assembly directly. There is no alternative. Educational inequity is the comprehensive, systemic policy of the Commonwealth of Virginia, carried out in one form or another for centuries. The schools that need the least money are in the jurisdictions with the highest income, paid for by the local real estate tax. Their ample bank accounts are segregated against the city's need for Rich Schools.

If we want Rich Schools and educational equity, we must change state educational strategy—to stop reducing schools to high-stakes testing mills. And we must change state funding policy—to make rich funding available where it is needed.

There is a simple solution, and it is probably the only solution:

1. **The state will fund 100% of the costs of public education.** Currently, it claims to fund 55% of its standard educational package, leaving an average of 45% to the localities. Localities with persons of lower income—and therefore higher educational need—cannot possibly afford Rich Schools to produce equitable education. They cannot find the tax money to pay for them.

2. **The state will base its funding of Rich Schools on the per capita income of student households of origin.** Fifty percent of the population—the half with the highest household income -- will be funded at the present, standards-of-learning level. Any extra funding will come from the discretionary income of the locality. The other 50%—on a sliding scale—will be funded up to twice as richly, ranging from a 50% increase for some to a 100% increase for the lowest income quarter of our students.

3. **The funding of public schools will come from a statewide tax on real estate.** Currently, the affluence of Richmond's suburbs allows them to have a richer school system with a real estate tax levy that is as much as one-third less than the state-impoverished center city. Creating a statewide real estate tax to pay for public education will make the requisite funds available in the right places, following the basic principle that you must tax where there is money. It will also reduce one of the primary incentives that the state currently gives for suburban sprawl and school segregation. Localities will adjust their local tax rate to accommodate the new state tax.

4. **The state will create a capital fund for school construction.** Since the General Assembly, reacting to school integration in the 1960's, decided to isolate center cities economically, Richmond and other center cities have been unable to keep up school maintenance and construction because their budgets would not support sufficient school bonds. The same is true of some impoverished rural areas. Richmond is, by some estimates, $600 million in arrears on school maintenance and construction, unable to issue bonds sufficient to remedy the situation. The state, which created this situation, has an obligation to provide the funding necessary for Rich Education for all.

5. **Richmond advocates will focus their efforts on the Commonwealth of Virginia, which created this inequity.** Part of the strategy of continued discrimination in Virginia since the end of Massive Resistance has been to deflect blame for inequity on the isolated, minority-led, center cities. Although there are, and will continue to be, issues with Richmond Public Schools as with any system, its biggest problems are dictated by the State of Virginia. The truth must be told. The state must be held accountable.

A Rich Education

6. **Rich Education is the Redemption of the Confederacy, attacking the heart of structural racism.** It is time to win—time to make it work—time to claim the heritage we know is there, to put our money where we know it is needed, and to stop acting as if there is nothing we can do. Education has always been the way to success and equity. The people of Richmond can devise the program, and seek the allies all over the state, for this to happen. It will be a win for all, the fulfillment of the dreams of generations, a major step toward the completion of the yet incomplete American Revolution.

Benjamin P. Campbell

The Rev. Ben Campbell is an Episcopal priest, the author of Richmond's Unhealed History. He is currently a Pastoral Associate at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond. For 28 years, he was Pastoral Director of Richmond Hill, an ecumenical Christian community in Church Hill, where he and his family were residential members. He was a founding member of the Armstrong Leadership Program; the Micah Association, connecting 125 faith communities to Richmond's elementary schools; the Armstrong Freshman Academy; Communities in Schools; and the Richmond Public Schools Educational Foundation, which started the Future Centers in Richmond's high schools. His four children attended RPS from start to finish. He is married to Annie Campbell, who just retired after 30 years as an educator at William Fox Elementary School. He is a member of the Richmond Slave Trail Commission, and is actively involved in plans for the Museum of the American Slave Trade in Shockoe.

Toward a Vision of Racial Equity in Richmond Schools

TAIKEIN COOPER
Executive Director, Virginia Excels
and
GENEVIEVE SIEGEL-HAWLEY
Associate Professor, School of Education, Virginia Commonwealth University

We both bring a nuanced perspective to education. Taikein is a native of Prince Edward County. Growing up three blocks from the historic R.R. Moton High School, he learned the impacts that flawed policy and selfish adults have on students. His passion is to guarantee that all families have the opportunity to design an education that piques the interest of their children. Genevieve is a graduate of Richmond Public Schools (RPS) who benefited from her experiences as a white student in nominally desegregated schools, which would later shape her interest in researching school segregation. At the same time, she also benefited from the accommodation that RPS continues to extend to white families.

Our vision for racial equity in Richmond schools includes real integration, enabled by stronger and more inclusive advocacy. It is based on our collective personal and professional experiences, research and best practices from around the country. We believe these strategies will lead us toward greater racial equity in Richmond and the education all of our children deserve.

Richmond education stakeholders need to work toward the "5 Rs," or Race & Enrollment, Resource Allocation, Real Relationships, Representative Staff and Faculty, and Restorative Justice.

Real Integration as a Goal

To advance racial equity in education, Richmond education stakeholders—all of us—need to work toward what youth activists in New York City have dubbed "real integration." Real integration deepens our collective consciousness around dismantling racial caste in public education. It is based on what NYC student activists call the "5 Rs," or Race & Enrollment, Resource Allocation, Real Relationships, Representative Staff and Faculty, and Restorative Justice. The students acknowledge that racial diversity in enrollment represents a first step on the path toward real integration, but then turn toward the importance of distributing educational resources equitably, fostering shared power and relationships across lines of difference, ensuring racial diversity among faculty and staff and approaching discipline restoratively rather than punitively. Real integration is a comprehensive and continuous process, one that stands to benefit individual students and our broader society. Students who learn early how to connect, think and problem solve across social cleavages will possess fundamental skills for an increasingly diverse 21st century workforce and democracy.

Real Integration in Historical Context

Real integration draws on elements of a too often overlooked 1968 U.S. Supreme Court decision dealing with a Richmond area school district. The Court's ruling in *Green v. New Kent County* required school districts to immediately eliminate segregation "root and branch," laying out six factors that would determine whether a district no longer operated two systems of schooling, one for Black students and one for white students. Like the more contemporary demand for real integration from NYC students, the *Green* factors went beyond ensuring that students of different

racial/ethnic backgrounds attended schools together to require desegregation in faculty assignment, facilities, transportation, extracurriculars and quality of education. *Green v. New Kent County* dealt specifically with the New Kent school division's long delay on school desegregation, exemplified by an inadequate freedom-of-choice plan that offered too little freedom or choice to Black families bearing the burden of tackling a system of racial oppression. The decision also addressed Massive Resistance that had unfolded elsewhere in Virginia, including the wholesale closure of public schools in Prince Edward County. Its emphasis on equalizing woefully unequal school facilities also got to the heart of what Barbara Johns, an early youth leader in the movement, demanded.

Authentic community engagement gives us an opportunity to elevate the voices of those most affected by flawed policy and practice.

In the wake of federal retrenchment on school desegregation enforcement, Richmond moved quickly to stem white and affluent flight to surrounding suburbs. The city accommodated—and continues to accommodate through student assignment policies—white and affluent preferences for schools and classrooms imbued with the highest status and containing the most meaningful educational resources. And when the high status schools do not have the necessary resources, unequal social and political capital ensures they are soon forthcoming. We have, as a society, continued to make policy choices that create and sustain racially segregated, high poverty schools and districts. Because we also then choose to starve those same schools and districts of much needed resources, **Richmond's accommodation of white and affluent educational preferences too often has come at the expense of historically marginalized students. While RPS has taken steps in the right direction, students don't receive the same education in each school.**

Harms of Racially Unequal Education—and Advocacy to Address Them

This is a situation that damages us all. It sanctions sharp discord between our democratic ideals and unequal reality, creating childhood confusion that closes racially and economically advantaged students off to the full humanity of their less advantaged peers. This, as Dr. Martin Luther King powerfully reminded us, "distorts the soul and damages the personality" of all involved. Ongoing accommodation to white and affluent families additionally means that as a community, we remain comfortable ill-equipping the overwhelming majority of Richmond students for participation in our economic and civic life.

Advocacy to undo these systemic injustices in Richmond has been marred by a culture of false starts and ulterior motives. Authentic community engagement gives us an opportunity to elevate the voices of those most affected by flawed policy and practice. To effectively do this, we must learn from other social movements to advocate for robust change in the city. As advocates, we should commit to the following:

- Embracing and nurturing youth activism.
- Remaining patiently impatient. Changing systems in a meaningful way takes time. We must understand and clearly communicate that these changes won't come overnight and some mistakes will be made along the way. Setting these expectations will be a quintessential task as we truly work to build "people power."
- Developing cross-racial dialogues and alliances.
- Centering needs of families of color; cultivating white allies that are willing to speak up about a system that continues to heavily cater to their interests.

- Supporting the recommendations put forward by the RPS Equity in Enrollment commission. We know that over the years, many students in RPS have been ineligible for admission or enrollment related to a host of barriers, including lack of transportation and difficult-to-attain prerequisites. While the current administration is working to eliminate those barriers, the Commission's work is rooted in not only making admission more equitable, but is also hyper-focused on supporting students who have been historically underrepresented at the specialty schools. Full disclosure: we are co-chairs of this commission, which also includes student and family voices, as well as the voices of RPS educators and cross-sector allies. In many ways, the commission embodies best practices outlined in this section.

The Choice and Solutions Before the City

Our city now confronts a choice. School segregation between Black and white students in Richmond has skyrocketed over the past several decades, even as residential segregation has slowly fallen. Roughly 70% of elementary school age children would need to change schools to achieve a racial distribution that reflects the overall RPS enrollment, compared to about 58% of residents. Ongoing separation in our schools is driven in part by how our school boards draw attendance zone boundaries and design choice policies that allow students to attend out-of-zone schools. It flows too from federal, state and local policies related to housing and land use and past and present discrimination in mortgage lending and real estate. Individual choices about where to live and send children to schools interact with these systems and are shaped by how much meaningful contact we have experienced with members of other racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Which brings us back to the fundamental importance of real integration in public education.

Based on our personal and professional experiences, and with real integration as our guide, we offer the following ideas for individuals, advocates and policymakers to consider as we move forward.

- Make existing school segregation a trigger for rezoning processes and ensure that new processes further integration and do not exacerbate segregation. These goals should be clearly delineated as among the top 1 or 2 priorities during the rezoning process. Center students' voices in rezoning by including student representatives on the committee and school board.
- Create diversity goals and weight current systems of choice like open enrollment and specialty schools to advantage disadvantaged students. As RPS expands secondary school choice with theme-based middle and high schools programs, ensure that civil rights guardrails like interest-based admissions, guaranteed transportation and extensive outreach define the system.
- Coordinate the housing, transportation and education sectors to enhance mobility and create more affordable housing in the zones associated with highly resourced schools.
- Transform how we fund schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Centralize and redistribute local PTA funds.
- Nurture teacher and leadership diversity in all RPS schools through intentional faculty assignment policies. Prioritize diversity in teacher and leadership pipelines.
- Support intensive, intentional efforts within RPS schools to disrupt racially disparate academic tracking and discipline.

- Work with our regional school division partners to ameliorate a regional system of segregation. Support efforts to expand access and equity in existing regional partnerships like the Governor's schools and draw on school choice lessons from CodeRVA, the first federally funded regional magnet school in the state.

There are many actions needed to enhance racial equity in the city of Richmond, but none are more pressing than transforming our public schools. Our current public education system is perpetuating inequities; sometimes by choice, and other times by force. RPS has made some small steps toward addressing this sobering truth, but we have not gone far enough. De facto segregation has not only limited educational opportunities available to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (who are disproportionately Black and brown), it permeates throughout the fabric of this city. As we grapple with heightened awareness to racial injustice in America, it's important for us to find viable solutions in this city as well. Embracing the aforementioned vision of real integration in Richmond Public Schools is the step in the right direction.

Taiken Cooper

Taikein Cooper is the Executive Director of Virginia Excels, which partners with students, families, and communities to shape public education by advocating for policies and practices that are good for all kids, regardless of race or family income.

Born in historic Prince Edward County, Taikein has a deep affection and strong commitment to local politics and helping people engage in the American political process. , one of the five counties in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case, Cooper is a 2006 graduate from both Southside Virginia Community College and Prince Edward County High School. He has lived in Virginia his entire life, except to attend college at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Genevieve Siegel-Hawley

Genevieve Siegel-Hawley is an associate professor of educational leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her research examines school segregation and resegregation in U.S. metropolitan areas, along with strategies for promoting inclusive school communities and policy options for a truly integrated society.

Between Two Litanies: Equity and Public Education in Richmond, VA

DENNIS WILLIAMS II

After asking a school-district leader in Richmond Public Schools if there was a way to address the habit of white families sending their children to county and private schools, I was told the best way to change the pattern was to make public schools "better." It was also suggested that I reframe the question to include affluent families of color since they do the same thing. That kind of accuracy is important. But most families that historically had this habit have been white families.[1] Most children in Richmond who go on to attend private and county schools today are white children. Most people who have not really supported equity in education have been white people. Many segregated private schools and county schools function as an apparatus in the continued resistance to desegregation and are, therefore, support race, class, and ability based apartheid.[2] I don't mean to get lost in the weeds just yet, so let's return to the anecdote:

> There I was, peering into a Google Meet made mostly of first-name initials, getting ready to preach in a Denzel Washington-Roman J. Israel-type voice, not at all worried about losing my job or paying my oppressive student loans. "Better?" I interrupted. "Better is what we've been fighting for since it was illegal for us to read, since we could not (and still cannot) legally congregate in public spaces without the specter of state surveillance or violence.
>
> "Better is school improvement and equalization campaigns, equal-pay lawsuits, federally authorized desegregation, and other such policies for which we have already argued and which have already been mandated by district, circuit, and supreme courts in such cases as *Bradley v. School Board of the City of Richmond*."[3] I paused here for dramatic effect before citing thirty-six other court cases from memory and cueing up snippets of the New York Times podcast, "Nice White Parents." Then I hollered, "Everybody, turn on your [expletive] cameras!"
>
> Beginning again with pretentious composure, I said, "Better is not a school system made to appease affluent families." Another well-placed, dramatic pause here. "The kind of better we need is the kind of better so antithetical to the logic of white supremacy that that logic must reflexively oppose it."

Though the exchange you just read was fabricated mostly, I did pose that question to a school-district leader in Richmond. Admittedly, I do not completely disagree with the answer it garnered (though I still take issue with its reframing); our public schools in Richmond need improvement, and many policies that exist, have existed, or could exist, would lead to a better, more equitable system of education. Some of those policies are listed below:

> *Converting private schools into desegregated magnet schools, providing universal income to families that are in need, decolonizing state-mandated curricula and standardized tests, abolishing the incarceral system targeting BIPOC youth, increasing teacher pay, increasing the number of non-white teachers and administrators, untethering funding from property values and sales taxes, increasing teacher-retention rates, ending the overidentification of BIPOC students as children with disabilities, mitigating bias and unjust*

treatment by introducing mindfulness to everyone in schools, desegregating schools, maintaining a diverse array of elective classes and other non-tested subjects, and providing free/high-quality education to everyone.

There is such a vast archive of similar examples from which I could pull that the purpose of this essay is simply to make the following points clear: Reforms, proposals, and policies such as those itemized above have been churned out year after year, decade after decade with a bit of traction at best and, at worst, a predictable and debilitating backlash.[4] This backlash can be viewed as a social mechanism as persistent as the struggle for racial equality itself. It sits stubbornly between an ever-growing litany of possible social changes and the oppressive social systems which it aims to protect. And, finally, this backlash functions in such a way that if we continue to generate educational policies while never fully addressing its magnitude and damage, we will never achieve educational equity even as we seek to make our schools "better."

I take this position because, for fourteen years, I've experienced the City of Richmond as a Black man of various, non-normative identities.I have studied the Civil Rights Movement under historian, Brian J. Daugherity, a mentor of mine who specializes in school desegregation in Virginia, and have also organized within various activist groups. I have taught university students about cultures of oppression and freedom. Most importantly, I have taught in Richmond Public Schools, at various Richmond-based non-profits, and at the Richmond City Jail. This list of experiences has made me acutely aware of how oppressed/non-white groups have mobilized in pursuits of equity, and how many of those groups view equity in education as vital.

Educational equity would look like educational reform implemented in the absence of the reflexive mechanism of white backlash which, again, has historically been racist but can be classist and ableist as well.

My experience also tells me that, when oppressed or non-white groups come very close to meaningful social change, white-identified folk often prevent it. Almost reflexively and not always in their own interest, a critical level of people who call themselves white make known in sometimes seemingly innocuous and sometimes incredibly violent ways that, "we can't have *that*, so we must *do this*." The phrase "do this" can be replaced with the term "*backlash*," which can take the form of anything between race massacres, massive resistance, white flight, benign neglect, voter suppression, terrorist insurrection (as seen on January 6, 2021), or threatening to send children to private schools. This is all to say, educational equity would look like educational reform implemented in the absence of the reflexive mechanism of white backlash which, again, has historically been racist but can be classist and ableist as well.

This brings us to an actual proposal: folk who identify as white can figure out how to stop those who also identify as white from backlashing while the work toward equity in education and elsewhere is done. As simple as this proposal is, it begs a series of questions:

a) *Why would white folk stop protecting their privileged social position to support sweeping improvements in a school system to which they do not currently send their children and to which they have not sent them since the days of Harry Byrd?*

b) *What will white folk do to turn white folk's minds away from an ethos of supremacist and elitist logic to one that is deeply humanizing and compassionate?*

I'm not sure how white people in Richmond will answer these questions or what productive solutions they will derive when they do. But, at this point, I see such answers and such solutions as the only innovative tools in our kit. Since this may be dissatisfying and nebulous for some, or unrealistic for others, I think it is best to make two additional points clear:

a) *It is not my responsibility as a Black person to figure out how white folk will stop the hatred and prejudice of other white folk from getting in the way of equity, broadly conceived, or in the way of equitable education, more specifically.*

b) *It is, however, my responsibility to tell the people who ought to have figured that out a long time ago to figure it out now.*

I must take this stance because throughout our nation's history, non-white people have been at the frontline in the struggle for racial equity. We still are, and, barring some major event, we will continue in this position. We are born into new generations, which are forced to do and say mostly the same things, augmenting what could become an infinite litany just to see a backlashing people get in its way. At such a juncture, to achieve equity in public schools, those with considerable privilege can begin to figure out how they will delete from their consciousness, from the consciousness of their loved ones, and from their institutions what bell hooks calls an ethic of domination,[5] which usually revolves around Whiteness, around other cultures of supremacy, and around this last litany which follows without order:

> *anti-Black racism, anti-Semitic racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Asian racism, anti-Latinx racism, colorism, ableism, ageism, sexism, sanism, classism, elitism, capitalism, anti-environmentalism, heteronormativism, imperialism, individualism, eurocentrism, materialism, patriarchy and whatever other interlocked system of oppression exists or will exist which, to quote the late poet Mark Aguhar, "I didn't describe, I couldn't describe, will learn to describe" but that we all should know are deeply wrong.*

Dennis Williams II

Dennis Williams II, MA, MEd, is a teacher in Richmond Public Schools and an adjunct professor in the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Department at Virginia Commonwealth University. In 2019, he was awarded *New Teacher of the Year* at Albert Hill Middle School in the City of Richmond. Most recently, he has been on-boarded as a facilitator at Richmond's Innerwork Center, formerly Chrysalis. As a high-school educator, his pedagogy centers on rigorous compassion and on embedding mindfulness practices into the curriculum. At the college level, he assists students in developing critical, cultural awareness through the analysis of visual culture. A writing hobbyist, he has poems forthcoming in Johns Hopkins University's *African American Review* and Illinois State University's *Obsidian Literature and Art in the African Diaspora*. Dennis was raised in Decatur, GA, and attended Atlanta's Dekalb School of the Arts before moving to Richmond for art school.

Endnotes

1 For examples of groups which opposed desegregation and for a summary of government assistance such as tuition grants and tax exemptions that benefited White private schools in Virginia, see Brian J. Daugherity's *Keep on Keeping on: The NAACP and the Implementation of Brown v. Board of Education in Virginia*, particularly chapters 5 and 6.

2 For an explanation of the social function of private schools in the South, see Charles T. Clotfelter's article "Private Schools, Segregation, and the Southern States."

3 See Brian J. Daugherity's chapter "The *Green* Light: The NAACP and School Integration in Virginia, 1968-1974" in *Keep on Keeping on*.

4 See Matthew F. Delmont's *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation*; See also Erwin Chemerinksy's chapter "The Segregation and Resegregation of American Public Education: The Courts' Role" in *School Resegregation: Must the South Turn Back?* and Michael J. Klarman's article "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis."

5 See bell hooks' chapter, "Love as Practice of Freedom" in *Outlaw Culture*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rich Education

BENJAMIN P. CAMPBELL

We must change state funding policy to make rich funding available where it is needed. Selected strategies for a Rich educational system:

- The state should fund 100% of the costs of public education.
- The state should base its funding of Rich Schools on the per capita income of student households of origin.
- The funding of public schools should come from a statewide tax on real estate.
- The state should create a capital fund for school construction.
- Richmond advocates should focus their efforts on the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Toward a Vision of Racial Equity in Richmond Schools

TAIKEIN COOPER AND GENEVIEVE SIEGEL-HAWLEY

To create racial equity in Richmond schools, we should adopt **Real Integration, based on the "5 Rs," or Race & Enrollment, Resource Allocation, Real Relationships, Representative Staff and Faculty, and Restorative Justice**.

Selected ideas for individuals, advocates and policymakers to consider as we move forward:

- Make existing school segregation a trigger for rezoning processes.
- Create diversity goals and weigh current systems of choice like open enrollment and specialty schools to advantage disadvantaged students.
- Coordinate the housing, transportation and education sectors to enhance mobility and create more affordable housing in the zones associated with highly resourced schools.
- Center needs of families of color and cultivate white allies that are willing to speak up.
- Support the recommendations put forward by the RPS Equity in Enrollment commission.

Between Two Litanies: Equity and Public Education in Richmond, VA.

DENNIS WILLIAMS II

To advance racial equity in public education:

- **White folks should address white backlash** against policies that support racial equity.
- It is not the responsibility of Black people to figure out how white folks will stop the hatred and prejudice of other white folk from getting in the way of equitable education.

ADVANCING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

From Red Lines to Brown Circles, Again: Reviving the Legacy of Maggie L. Walker for Inclusive Economic Liberation

SHEKINAH MITCHELL
Community Builder

"Cash rules everything around me
C.R.E.A.M., get the money
Dollar dollar bill, y'all"
Wu Tang Clan

The hook to the popular song, C.R.E.A.M by hip-hop group, Wu-Tang has been widely referenced in American culture and music since its release in 1994. You don't have to be a Wu-Tang Clan fan to identify how these lyrics may illuminate some of our nation's greatest values—money and capitalism. In fact, racism as we know it was actually constructed and fueled by capitalism. Author of "How to be an Anti-Racist," Ibram X. Kendi calls racism and capitalism conjoined twins.[1] This dynamic duo has fueled some of the most treacherous institutions for Black and brown communities in our country: the gruesome 200-year American enslavement of Africans, the 13th amendment, the prison industrial complex, human trafficking syndicates (both sexual and labor)[2] and now the invisible, yet intentional racialized disparities we see today. We can see the cumulative impacts on these ties by looking at income and wealth by race.

> According to 2019 census data, Blacks earned a median income of 61 cents for every dollar compared to whites, and Hispanics earned 74 cents.[3] Beyond income (cash flow), net worth (assets minus debt) gives an even clearer indication of wealth, and whether considering the median or mean family wealth, Black and brown households have less than 20% of the wealth white households have according to the Federal Reserve Bank's 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances.[4]

	White	Black	Brown
Median family wealth (50th percentile)	$188,200	$24,100	$36,100
Mean family wealth (average)	$983,400	$142,500	$165,500

The tethered relationship of capitalism and racism requires that the dialogue about a more racially equitable Richmond include an honest conversation about money and wealth. We address this by invoking the legacy of Richmond's own, Maggie L. Walker, to rebuild access to our own financial institutions with inclusive practices aimed at closing racial disparities and promoting communal gain over capitalism.

"Cash is king, but credit is power."
Marriet Allen

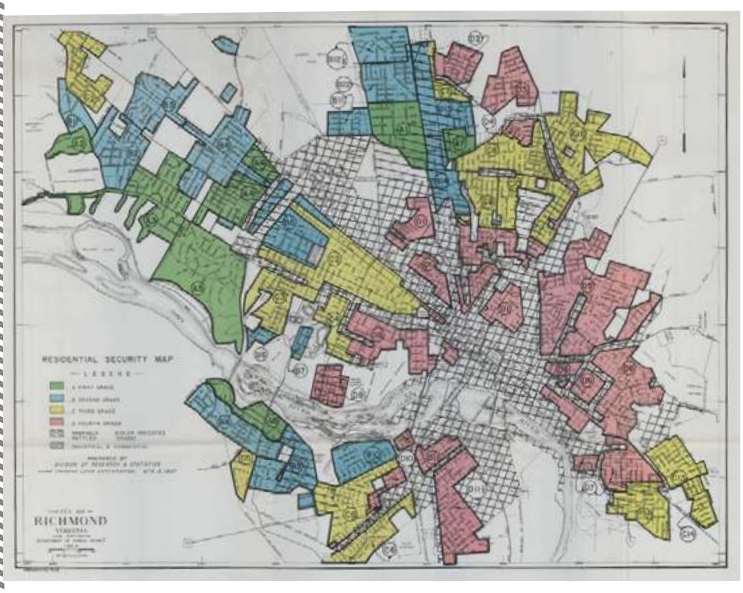
When it comes to cash, recent legislation to ultimately raise Virginia's minimum wage to $15 an hour and Richmond's Office of Community Wealth Building's campaign to define what a living wage is for our community and reward organizations meeting those benchmarks, are examples of work happening to get more cash in the hands of

From Red Lines to Brown Circles, Again:

Richmonders. Other programs like the Giving Wall support low-income families in meeting one-time immediate cash needs. The pandemic brought an influx of family cash payments and small business grants which helped meet short term cash needs for families and entrepreneurs. While there is still much work to be done, the faithful advocacy for workforce reform and a renewed focus on small business investment are pushing us in a more hopeful direction.

However, in today's society, whether building wealth through homeownership (mortgage) or through entrepreneurship (startup loan, line of credit, business credit card etc.), engaging with financial institutions to borrow money has become a prerequisite for building wealth.

With this in mind, if I were to remix Wu-Tang's classic, the title would be C³.R.E.A.M. because cash, credit and capital are ruling American life. This interdependent trio of cash, credit and capital are the formula to determine wealth in this nation, and all three are tied to financial institutions and economic systems of racialized oppression.



Mapping Inequality: Richmond, Virginia 1940[5]

The Red Lines that Got Us Here

In most cases, the traditional paths to building wealth in our nation require engaging with banks and other financial institutions for mortgages and business loans, but these institutions are still grappling with the consequences of redlining.

These red lines changed the social and economic trajectory of Richmond and communities across the country, deeply restricting access to mortgages, business loans and other capital. As shown in the map below, Richmond's East End, North Side, Jackson Ward and parts of South Side within closest proximity to downtown, were all redlined.

These lines were used to divide, separate, and reinforce racial hierarchies, and consequently affirm a white supremacist culture of self-interest over communal impact.

Although policy has changed, for many communities in Richmond, these red lines have not been erased. Through programs like credit counseling and repair and down payment assistance, we have spent our efforts building on-ramps for people of color to be considered worthy by banks. Community development financial institutions and credit unions offer special loan funds and try to leverage government programs like opportunity zones and tax credits to incentivize investment and development projects in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods. In many cases these products and programs are paired with capital from traditional banks in order to close gaps and make the development projects profitable and viable. These efforts have made a difference for some families in our community; however, this falls short of justice.

Our goals must grow beyond increasing bankability into financial systems built on capitalism corrupted by racism and instead stretch to create inclusive, communal pathways to economic liberation.

From Red Lines to Brown Circles, Again: Revising the Legend of Maggie L. Walker

Lines are being re-drawn today through gentrification. If you want to buy a house, you need to qualify for a mortgage, and you will pay back on average 171%[6] of what you borrowed and that is after having the cash for a down payment and closing costs and a qualifying credit score, which are also racially discriminatory.[7] Lines are drawn in entrepreneurship because, "According to findings from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Black entrepreneurs are nearly three times more likely than White entrepreneurs to have business growth and profitability *negatively* impacted by a lack of financial capital."[8]

Back to Brown Circles: What Would Maggie Do?

Maggie Walker established St. Luke Penny Savings Bank in 1903 with money collected from members of the Order of St. Luke, making her the first African American woman to found and become president of a bank.

"The pennies, dimes and dollars of one individual may be few indeed, but the combined dimes and dollars of a thousand individuals changed the weak word few into the powerful word many."
***Maggie L. Walker*[9]**

When others were drawing red lines, Maggie was building brown circles.

Her strength and power were rooted in her ability to see collective opportunity over individual gain. She knew that even though individual Black households had very little income, the power of pooling those resources together could create a mighty force. Part of Maggie's legacy is being the first woman to own a bank, and because of that incredible accomplishment during the Jim Crow era, the St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank offered mortgages, savings accounts, small business loans and other products that contributed to Jackson Ward becoming the Black Wall Street and the Harlem of the South. Maggie did banking differently, and here are some examples of how she prioritized the needs of her community over business as usual:

- St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank made loans as low as $5, which was roughly one week's worth of wages and is equivalent to roughly $150 today.[10]

- Her bank's hours went into the evening 6 days a week to be accessible to her constituents who worked during the day.[10]
- Maggie had community-based credit committees that relied on references (not solely on income, algorithms or credit score).[10]
- While traditional banks required 40% down during those times, St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank accepted 10% down, which would be equivalent to 5% down in today's market. [10]
- Her bank used a collective decision-making model where all stockholders (even those with a fraction of a share) had voting rights and input on operations.[10]
- Maggie engaged youth as ambassadors and employees, going door to door to build trust in St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank. Freedman's Savings & Trust was funded by congress to serve Blacks in 1865, but was out of business because of corrupt white managers by 1874. Black depositors only got on average 60% of what they deposited, and many lost all their money. Maggie was battling uphill against well-deserved distrust.[10]

Maggie's strategies to do banking differently led to providing financing through St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank for 40% of Black-owned homes in Richmond. By the 1920's, 650 of these mortgages were completely paid off.[10] These practices and subsequent outcomes are outstanding, and over one hundred years later, Richmond still craves the revival of this legacy, while most of our historically Black communities are grappling with poverty and gentrification.

If she was able to accomplish so much in the early 1900's, can you imagine what would be possible if we did that today?

So often, we forget that the story of African Americans does not start on our knees in shackles on Native American land, but it begins in Africa full of rich traditions, culture and a village mentality. Linear thinking, individualism, either/or thinking, zero sum gain are all traits of white supremacy culture.[11] Communities of color traditionally aren't linear but communally minded, and we need to combine the opportunities for wealth building with a collective mindset to begin breaking repetitive cycles of injustice.

What Would Brown Circles Look Like?

Brown circles are strategies to close racialized economic disparities by prioritizing inclusive, communal benefit over maximizing individual profit.

Here are some examples of brown circle strategies:

- Black and brown folks pool resources into a neighborhood/community LLC to:
  - » Collectively purchase properties and land in gentrifying communities to develop housing ourselves and preserve affordable access to communities.
  - » Assist home-owners who are behind on taxes or without the capital to update their homes to "age in place" by providing low-interest capital and an alternative to losing their homes because they are tax delinquent or from predatory offers far below what their homes are worth.

- Long-term action: Start a Richmond-based, Black-owned credit union or bank:
  - » Offer low-interest mortgages, HELOCs, lines-of-credit, credit cards, micro-lending, low-interest small business loans and other financial products based on community need that look beyond racialized algorithms and credit scores to determine credit-worthiness.
  - » Funding sources:
    - Account holders—share the vision with friends, family-members, neighbors, businesses, foundations, nonprofits etc. to begin building a base of capital. The same money circulating in our community now could be re-routed and activated for communal economic liberation.
    - Foundations and philanthropists who have principal balances of millions of dollars that generate grants and gifts based on interest gains could activate a portion of those principal balances to serve as lending capital to achieve their philanthropic goals.
    - Corporations and banks eager to gain Community Reinvestment Act credits could partner and invest in this venture.

Some may question if starting a Black bank is the right strategy, but I would challenge us all to dig deeply into the troubling history of banking in the United States by reading Mehrsa Baradaran's *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap*. She comprehensively and methodically illuminates the undeniable injustices within the banking industry and why Black communities in particular continue to be excluded from access to capital. She calls out federal interventions like the Community Development Financial Institutions fund, the Clinton administration's empowerment zones, Nixon's façade efforts to foster Black capitalism and a history of strategies that fail to open access to capital for the Black community.[12] While advocating for more equitable financial intervention through federal strategies is important, there needs to be a parallel path that activates communal power for our own economic liberation. It is also important to consider that Black-owned banks in the United States are in crisis. Between 2001-2018, the number of Black-owned banks declined by over 50% and this trend has continued.[13]

Now is the time for radical, community-based intervention, and shifting to a brown circles mindset that pushes Richmond to be a more racially equitable place benefiting everyone struggling to find the on-ramp to traditional pathways of wealth building.

Don't Settle for Holding the Red Marker

Conversations in our community have continued to shift to focus on diversity, inclusion and equity, and from an upsurge in equity-related roles within nonprofits and businesses, to task forces, committees and strategic plans, there are measurable actions being taken to advance racial equity. In many cases, championing for racial diversity in leadership roles, staffing, board members etc. is an incredibly important step along the journey to equity that cannot be ignored.

However, when considering the role of financial institutions, a more racially equitable Richmond wouldn't be Black and brown people adopting the same practices of white supremacy.

The practice of drawing red lines around communities in the 1930's operationalized race-based exclusion. At its core, redlining created on-ramps to financial opportunity for some, while drawing a clear red boundary around others. If we overlay racial diversity onto similar strategies rooted in individualistic capitalism, we will end up with racially diverse decision-makers drawing new red lines that still determine who is in and who is out. Maybe those excluded would be families earning low-moderate incomes, those who are physically disabled, immigrant communities

or others still fighting for equitable access to opportunity. While it is an undeniably important step, systems of oppression aren't dismantled by simply diversifying those in power because decades of assimilation has infected nearly every American, regardless of their race, with the lie of white supremacy.

In other words,let's not settle for defining racial equity as having red markers in the hands of Black and brown people, but let us build our own pathways and create a new, more equitable culture around financial empowerment. Maggie said it best:

"Let us awake. Let us arise. We have the men, we have the women, we have the brains. Let us form a partnership of heads and brains and actually do something. Let us have a bank that will take the nickels and turn them into dollars!"
Maggie L. Walker

Shekinah Mitchell

Shekinah Mitchell is a native Richmonder who has worked within the nonprofit sector for over 12 years. She currently serves as the Community Liaison for Systems Equity at the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation where she focuses on the remediation of systemic barriers and equitable engagement of families. She holds a bachelor's in Business Management from Radford University and a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University where her research focused on community engagement and cultural placemaking to advance racial equity. She has a wide range of experience covering youth development and affordable housing to systems building and quality improvement. In addition to her personal experience with banking and financial institutions, her professional experience supporting wealth building, financial opportunity, minority home-ownership and small business development in Richmond's East End and North Side inspired this essay.

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The Role of the Business Community in Creating a More Equitable Richmond

BRIAN ANDERSON
President & CEO, ChamberRVA

Our nation is experiencing a movement. Another awakening like other times in our checkered history. As Americans, we have not lived up to our ideals that all men and women are created equal and would by design enjoy equitable opportunities. The ideal or vision for a nation built on the ideals of freedom and liberty are honorable ideals. However, we have failed in our execution of building an equitable society where all people have an equal shot at achieving the American Dream. Obviously, hard work and perseverance are important to this argument, but these virtues are not relevant when systemic barriers impede many from succeeding.

As a nation, we have benefitted from the safety nets established during the New Deal. These "nets" may have limited hardships facing our most marginalized citizens, but they have done little to offer the true opportunities that America boasts of offering. Zip codes, skin color, availability of well-funded and supported schools, and affordable housing and transportation options have routinely limited the opportunities that were supposedly available to all. Communities are built by and for people. Therefore, communities are unique to their residents. And within all communities, large and small, differences abound.

All communities possess three important institutions that contribute (or don't) to the collective success of the community: The public sector, the philanthropic sector, and the private/business sector. As a Chamber of Commerce professional, I have spent 14 years leading critical community initiatives on behalf of the business / private sector. As a Chamber, we also work with and partner with the philanthropic and public sectors regularly in addressing important community issues.

And given the robust action in raising the bar for a more equitable society, the business community has an obligation to join the movement for a more equitable America. We have the means and the obligation to do more. Many companies have been leading on equity issues for many years. Policies of hiring, compensating and promoting people of color in a more equitable way have been increasing across the corporate landscape for many years. But all companies and businesses have not joined in or have not done so at an appropriate rate. Intended or unintended biases still exist. We still acknowledge and celebrate the first person of color or woman to lead this or be elected to that much more often than we should for 2021.

But tragedies over the last few years have ultimately created and sustained a movement that all should embrace. Not just because of the pain that is associated, or the anguish felt by our marginalized friends and colleagues; we can and should appreciate this moment in time because of the power for change that it offers. We can pause, emote, discuss, and feel the movement. Or better yet, truly imagine a world where all people are appreciated and celebrated for exactly who they are. No bias, no prejudice, no judgement. We are truly created to be equal people with equal rights and privileges available to all.

As a relative newcomer to Richmond but a native of the South, I was aware of the racial history of Richmond. Although aware, I was not prepared for how pervasive the racial history impacted everyday life. As a business leader, I think we can and should take the lead on the imperatives to create a more just, equitable and inclusive

society. Research has shown that diverse companies perform better than less diverse companies. Businesses, by their composition of associates, can socialize norms quicker than society at large. We are affected and influenced by our customers. Most businesses want to serve as many customers as possible. It is in our self-interest to equitably resemble the markets we serve, and the associates we employ. To maximize our economic interests, we must be intentional about diverse hiring, promoting, compensating, and marketing.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."
Solomon in Proverbs 29:18

Following the tragic murder of George Floyd, the Board of Directors of ChamberRVA, the regional Chamber of Commerce for Greater Richmond, chose to act. We chose to accelerate our actions to lead on building a more equitable region. We created a task force composed of enthusiastic and passionate leaders who could have the hard conversations, who could check their own bias, and who could strategically build a framework for action that would allow the business community to lean in and advance needed reforms.

They took time to have the hard conversations, to listen, and developed strategies that could make a difference in building a more equitable region.

This task force reviewed the work of similar organizations in the United States who were having similar conversations. They analyzed the different areas of society where barriers persisted, and opportunities did not. They offered best practices that their companies were implementing. They took time to have the hard conversations, to listen, and developed strategies that could make a difference in building a more equitable region. The taskforce developed a framework that focuses on three primary strategic imperatives for the business community, which we believe will create a more equitable Richmond region. We believe the business community needs to:

1. Adopt more equitable policies and processes and make a commitment to embed diversity, equity and inclusion into their organizations.

2. Develop initiatives that elevate students of color to create more pathways to viable careers and economic mobility.

3. Remove barriers in the supplier ecosystem so that more Black and brown businesses have access and greater capacity.

The Chamber is committed to leading the business community in the ongoing work of dismantling systemic racism to create greater economic opportunity, helping business leaders build their knowledge and capacity in the work of racial equity and inclusion and supporting best practices and actions to amplify our collective impact in advancing racial equity in the region. Thus, we will help lead the business community in these important strategic imperatives.

Adopt Equitable Policies and Processes

Our larger companies have the resources, and many have adopted stronger DE&I best practices. Most small and medium sized companies do not have the resources, financial or human, to implement DE&I best practices. As a regional business organization, we will develop and share policies and procedures for these companies. We hope

to model the same as a small organization in our board representation, our hiring, and our leadership representation. Our goal is to ensure that all businesses have the tools to be a more equitable workplace.

We have started this work by developing and implementing a "Shared Values Series" in the late summer of 2020. This series began the hard conversations needed by the leaders of our region. We brought in national, regional, and local thought leaders to discuss varying topics on race, social justice, and economic mobility. We will develop and implement a similar series in the late summer of 2021.

Develop Initiatives that Elevate Students of Color

Education is often a primary determinant of a person's economic trajectory. Education as an institution is not equitable. Zip codes and property values routinely determine the resources available for educating our children. A majority of Black and brown children live in more economically challenged school districts and do not receive the same quality education as white children. We will work across the Richmond region, identifying the neighborhoods and schools that are economically challenged and intervene with policies and programs that minimize or eliminate inequity. Our goal is to eliminate systemic inadequacies in our schools and school systems such that all students have access to a high-quality education regardless of zip code.

Zip codes and property values routinely determine the resources available for educating our children.

We started this work in assessing dual enrollment participation for our Black and brown students. And determining the capacity for career and technical education pathways as well across the various school divisions. We will work with businesses in our high demand career industries to provide internships and apprenticeship opportunities for our Black and brown students and externships for our educators.

Removing Barriers in the Supplier Ecosystem

We have taken the first steps of partnering with eleven large employers to understand the landscape of this work. Through a survey, we have collected valuable data about industry types, dollar amount of annual purchasing, and percentage of minority participation. Working with the Metropolitan Business League and the Jackson Ward Collective, we will also survey minority owned businesses on industry type, financial capacity available by business, areas of operation, etc. With the data from both surveys, we hope to connect suppliers and purchasers more directly through contracts won and feedback provided to those suppliers who are not selected. We hope this direct interaction will help drive more business development, more hiring of Black and brown employees, and more wealth creation by Black and brown owned businesses.

Conclusion

The entire Chamber team is passionate about this work and we want to be the change that is needed in our organization, our region and our nation. There are similar Chamber led initiatives in many cities and regions across the U.S.; Tulsa, OK, Greenville, SC, and Charlotte, NC, but no city or region has succeeded. There is more work to be done and the business community can play a key role in advancing racial equity if we are intentional about transforming our policies, practices and actions. When we are successful in leading our region forward, in building systems of opportunity that will displace very entrenched barriers, we will achieve the ultimate vision for Richmond. We will have become a region of opportunity for all, not the few. We will have systematically lifted all people up and affirmed that all men and all women of all races are truly free and equal. Then, and only then, can we all pursue and achieve the American dream.

The Role of the Business Community in Creating a More Equitable Richmond

Brian Anderson

Brian Anderson is a native of Florence, SC, and a graduate of Francis Marion University with a BS in Economics. He lives in Midlothian, Virginia, with his wife, Heather. They have two adult children, Douglas and Sarah Whitney and a daughter-in-law, Abby.

Before becoming a Chamber of Commercial professional, Brian served four years in the U.S. Army as a Military Intelligence Officer, eighteen years in the beverage industry with both Coca-Cola and Anheuser-Busch. He also served as the elected Chairman of the Whitfield County Board of Commissioners from 2005-2008.

Anderson began his Chamber career at the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce in 2008 and served 7 years in that capacity. He served as the President & CEO of the Greater Columbus GA Chamber of Commerce from 2015-2019. He earned his Institute of Organizational Management certification from the U.S. Chamber in 2012.

In September 2019, Anderson was appointed as President & CEO of ChamberRVA, a regional Chamber of Commerce, representing the Greater Richmond VA region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From Red Lines to Brown Circles, Again: Reviving the Legacy of Maggie L. Walker for Inclusive Economic Liberation

SHEKINAH MITCHELL

Brown circles are strategies to close racialized economic disparities by prioritizing inclusive, communal benefit over maximizing individual profit. Examples of brown circle strategies:

- **Black and brown folks pool resources into a neighborhood/community LLC to:**
  - » Collectively purchase properties and land in gentrifying communities to develop housing ourselves and preserve affordable access to communities.
  - » Assist home-owners who are behind on taxes or without the capital to update their homes to "age in place" by providing low-interest capital.
- **Start a Richmond-based, Black-owned credit union or bank:**
  - » Offer low-interest mortgages and other financial products based on community's need that look beyond racialized algorithms and credit scores to determine credit-worthiness.

The Role of the Business Community in Creating a More Equitable Richmond

BRIAN ANDERSON

Strategies the business community could employ to advance racial equity include:

- **Adopting more equitable policies and processes** and making a commitment to embed diversity, equity and inclusion into their organizations.
- Developing initiatives that **elevate students of color** to create more pathways to viable careers and economic mobility.
- **Removing barriers in the supplier ecosystem** so that more Black and brown businesses have access and greater capacity.

SHIFTING POWER AND REIMAGINING PARTNERSHIPS

Peace for Communities of Color: A Conversation Between a Black Woman and a White Woman on Shifting Power and the Need for Radical Imagination in the Nonprofit Sector

LEA WHITEHURST-GIBSON
Executive Director, Virginia Community Voice
and
BEKAH KENDRICK
Strategic Partnerships Director, Virginia Community Voice

An equitable Richmond would be a place where **leaders of color have access to the resources we need to protect the people we love and build thriving communities according to our own vision—**without adopting oppressive norms that exhaust, harm, and undermine our work.

An equitable Richmond would be a place where people of color have freedom **to reimagine a new way of being,** one that works for all people regardless of race or identity.

An equitable Richmond would be a place where **people of color can rest and be at peace**.

My name is Lea Whitehurst Gibson, and I am the CEO and Founder of Virginia Community Voice. In the nonprofit sector, where I work, we are on a journey toward this vision, but we are in a **constant tug of war with the status quo**. The sector is founded on ideals of generosity, charity, and good works. Ostensibly, nonprofits and philanthropy fight injustice.

But paternalism, colonialism, and white saviorism are also the legacy of nonprofits and they show up so strongly that we are **often unable to imagine a new way of solving problems**.

Tené Traylor of the Kendeda Fund says, "Philanthropy is really centered on this notion of charity and benevolence to its core. There are assumptions of privilege and power wrapped up in that. For us to see progress, it's not just about trusting the black leader. It's not just about having black folks at the table. It's about right-sizing those investments accordingly. It's about us trusting black folks to tackle black liberation and black solutions in a meaningful way. We need to continue to have the conversation. Certain folks need to get out of the way."

Equity for Richmond requires a culture shift within the nonprofit and philanthropic sector. Despite an increasingly diverse nation, white people make up the majority of nonprofit executive leadership. Though local data are scarce, a 2017 report found that most Central Virginia nonprofit leaders are white women.

White people in the nonprofit sector need to identify harmful norms and ways of being that keep us from seeing the issues clearly, that exclude people who actually experience the issues we're trying to solve. These are norms that *do not serve anyone who is truly committed to equity*.

Peace for Communities of Color: A Conversation Between a White Woman and a Black Woman

I'm tired of equity washing, when institutions say they are committed to racial equity yet the organization's leadership is still all white, and there is no power sharing with directly impacted Black and brown communities.

As a Black woman, a mother, a nonprofit executive, a community organizer, seeking justice for Black and brown communities is already hard work. But adapting and conforming to the norms of nonprofit culture that are rooted in white supremacy and colonialism is exhausting.

I am tired of not being trusted. I'm tired of seeing how every system has been created to hurt me, my family, and the people of color I love. I'm tired of having to tell the same story. Of getting pennies on the dollar compared to white-led organizations. I'm tired of equity washing, when institutions say they are committed to racial equity yet the organization's leadership is still all white, and there is no power sharing with directly impacted Black and brown communities.

That is the truth. **And my sharing where I am emotionally is an example of a different way of being. It's a way to resist cultural norms that say emotion has no place at work.**

We need a radical imagination for something new.

An equitable Richmond requires something much deeper than policy change, diversity and inclusion efforts, racial equity training, or even targeted grantmaking to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) led organizations. All of these are important but they are intellectual approaches, and don't heal the racialized trauma that people of color and white people carry around *in our bodies*. They don't offer us a process through which BIPOC are trusted to radically reimagine our communities.

I have teamed up with my colleague Bekah Kendrick, who is a white woman, a mother, a nonprofit leader, fundraiser and former grant maker who leverages resources for Virginia Community Voice. Together, we've named some organizational culture norms that show up commonly in nonprofits to exclude the voices of BIPOC and other marginalized groups in decision making and impede effective community engagement.

We will walk you through what needs to be done to disrupt these behaviors, and share our success with a fundamentally different way of running a nonprofit.

Power Shifting

Lea: **I understand power to be the ability to help, or to hurt.** Communities that have been historically marginalized typically do not have power in the institutional sense.

A story might help illustrate what I mean. Last year, my husband and I tried to refinance our house. When we got to the bank, the loan officer took one look at us, asked what we were there for and said, "well there is a $500 dollar appraisal fee that you have to pay out of pocket, do you have the money to do that?"

We did of course. But we didn't get the loan. Later, we inquired as to why and the bank said there were problems with our credit.

Both my husband and I had credit scores well over 720 (the minimum to get the most favorable interest rate) and very little debt.

We asked what specifically about our credit was problematic and they told us it was unclear.

But it wasn't unclear to us.

Credit scores and so many things about access to wealth in this country were built to keep me, my family and people who look like us out of wealth building opportunities. And when we ask why, the answer is typically "well, it is something you did wrong."

It is always framed as a personal problem, which obscures the truth—that our legal and financial systems are not built for Black people. In fact, they are built intentionally to keep us out.

My husband and I walked away from that experience feeling dejected, angry and powerless to change anything about that interaction.

That loan officer, the system she is a part of and the algorithms that were used to determine whether or not we should get that loan, all had the ability to help or hurt us. Both historically and in 2020, they chose to hurt us. The system used past knowledge of what investments are safe and what is risky and they determined that we were not safe.

That is what power does to maintain itself. People with power can make judgements about who they perceive to be safe or unsafe and build policies and practices around those judgements.

It is hard to see this power sometimes, especially when it works for, not against you.

That's why power shifting is needed. A shift in power puts the ability to change unjust systems in the hands of people who can see injustice so clearly. If we are committed to racial equity, this is the path to seeing real change.

Until people who are directly impacted are the ones designing the solutions to the issues they have themselves identified, we won't close the gaps in outcomes for all of our communities. If we build a more just and equitable decision making process, it will be good for people of color yes, but it will also be good for everyone else too.

Right now, paternalism in nonprofits says white and wealthy people, people with academic credentials know better than the "disadvantaged communities" they serve. Until this assumption changes, we will not have equity.

People of color having a seat at the table is the bare minimum. Equity demands more than this. People of color and other historically marginalized groups need to be **building the table**.

Bekah: White women have more socio-economic and political power than we like to acknowledge. Because of our proximity to white men, and our usefulness within a system of white supremacy, we have greater access to power. Disavowal of this power is harmful; it allows us to equate our experience of oppression as women with the fight for liberation by people of color.

We honor the many white women suffragists and feminists who have experienced sexism. But historically, the bodies of white women and our children have been afforded more protection than those of women and children of color when we speak truth to power. We may be silenced, but less frequently are we killed. In fact, our protection has been used to justify violence against Black and brown bodies throughout the history of this country.

But what is demanded in exchange for this protection? For me, it has required a disconnection from my body, from my experience, from my humanity. To avoid feeling, I escape through intellectualizing, order and control, the written word, and "doing good." I avoid conflict and defer to traditional authority. I conform to the capitalist belief that success and progress means bigger and more, and uphold unrealistic expectations for myself, my colleagues, and the nonprofits I've helped fund.

My way of operating is inherited from my European ancestors and has gone unchecked in my churches, schools and workplaces where there was too little diversity of thought, and constant praise from white teachers and mentors for conformity.

Though I didn't build my house, I am responsible for it. For me, this means reschooling, unlearning, waking up to the reality that the ways of being I find effective and efficient...they hurt people of color and actually hurt me too.

Trust

Lea: Trusting people of color to reimagine, implement solutions effectively, and allocate resources is a significant part of moving things forward. Part of the way that oppression has manifested itself in our communities is the way it makes us second guess ourselves when we do have a seat at the table. Trusting people of color (particularly black women) with money and power without reservation or second guessing is part of how we tear down white supremacy norms and begin to operate in radical imagination.

Bekah: It takes courage to see the shadow sides of what we've been taught is normal. And whether or not we like to admit it, we've been taught not to trust people of color. Even if not overtly, through subtle messages surrounding us that showed us only white people in positions of power and leadership.

What does it look like to trust BIPOC, especially women? For me, this has looked like decentering myself, taking on a supporting role in the organization, and being quieter. It means believing Black women when they say they see injustice and inequity. I may not see it at first, but that's not because it isn't there, it's because I've been raised to not see it. If we cannot see clearly, how can we lead?

I love this quote from **Anastasia Reesa Tomkin**, "A good white leader is a good white follower. If you cannot serve the cause of racial justice from the sidelines, instead of trying to be the superstar or the warrior hero, you're not quite getting the concept of what black liberation entails." I still mess up, but try not to let that derail me. Unlearning is a process.

Reimagine

Lea: At Virginia Community Voice, we have reimagined the process of community engagement and decision making. This looks like creating and holding space for people of color to step into their power as leaders. Our model of community engagement centers people who are directly impacted by racial inequity and injustice. This four stage process—Listen, Connect, Craft, Reflect—has been used to engage more than 1,000 neighbors in collective action along the Richmond Highway Corridor since 2017, through an initiative called RVA Thrives.

Bekah: As a white woman in a fund development role at a BIPOC-led and BIPOC-serving organization, my daily work is to release the tight grip of certainty that white supremacy culture offers me and step into the unknown, trusting that what is on the other side will be more abundant, beautiful, and holistic. To check whether I am gatekeeping, by withholding or hoarding information and resources. And to be willing to have uncomfortable conversations with

other white people, in particular donors and institutional funders about racism, colonialism, and other oppressive norms that show up in nonprofit fundraising.

At Virginia Community Voice, we've taken bold steps toward equity in fundraising through the creation of our Courageous Fundraising Principles, inspired by the Community-Centric Fundraising movement.

A Word on Urgency

Lea: The kind of culture shift we are calling for in nonprofits, philanthropy, and across all institutions is long-term, lifetime work. We know this. **And, what if racism, sexism, colonialism, and all forms of oppression could be eradicated in your lifetime? How would you act?**

We act with urgency and we invite you to act with urgency as well. The lives of my loved ones depend on it. The norms we are referencing that need to change—they create a cultural numbness to the devaluing, harming and killing of Black and brown bodies. That is not OK.

It's not okay that I feel fear for my black father, mother, sister, brothers, husband and friends every time they walk outside. I pray this will not be the same fear that I have for my five month old son as he grows up. I want a different future for him, in which he does not have to bear the perpetual fear and exhaustion of all of us who came before him.

Will you join us?

Lea Whitehurst-Gibson

Lea Whitehurst-Gibson is the Founder and CEO of Virginia Community Voice. Previously, Lea was the Director of Community Engagement at Thriving Cities Group. She used to be Executive Director of Richmonders Involved to Strengthen our Communities (RISC), where she organized 1,000 people annually from 20 diverse congregations to stand together for just practices. Lea has a degree in theology from Elim Bible College. She is a seasoned community organizer, a Black woman, a wife, and a mother. Lea and her husband are foster parents and live on Richmond's North Side.

Bekah Kendrick

As Strategic Partnerships Director for Virginia Community Voice, Bekah Kendrick manages fund development and communications. Her previous roles include Technical & Grant Writer for Thriving Cities Group and Director of Community Impact at United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, where she managed $1.8 million in grant funding to Richmond-area nonprofits. Bekah has a Bachelors in American Studies from The College of William & Mary and Master's in English from Virginia Commonwealth University. Bekah is a white woman, a wife, and a mother, who enjoys being near the water with her husband and son.

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Reframing Equity: The Gift of Being a Giver

DAMON JIGGETTS
Executive Director, Peter Paul Development Center

A gift has tremendous power. Not only is the power of a gift conveyed in its value, but also through the sentiment with which it was given. A gift can evoke emotions of compassion and gratitude shared by the giver and the recipient. A gift is given without an expectation of reciprocity, compensation, or commendation. The giver is compelled to give by the innate needs to contribute value and feel valuable. I learned about the power of the gift incredibly early in my life and I am constantly reminded of this lesson even today.

My sister and I were raised by two strong women, our mother and grandmother. Our grandmother was one of the kindest, most giving souls you would ever meet and did so without hesitating or any need of acknowledgment. Our mother struggled to make ends meet, while managing health issues and pursuing a college degree. I always had a heightened awareness of how hard she worked to ensure we had what we needed and some of what we wanted. I also admired my grandmother for how selfless she was. These women shaped who I am today, and their lived experiences are central to the opinions of this essay.

The focus of this essay will be on the power of giving. I hope to challenge our definition of equity and present us with a more progressive paradigm shift in how we achieve true equity. Essentially, **I invite us to see equity as being achieved when those perceived as having little power, resources or gifts can give of themselves in ways that are not only meaningful to someone else or community, but evokes a sense of pride, self-worth, and value in themselves.** No one wants to be dependent upon others or seen as a "charity case." Regardless of where we reside, our socio-economic status or the mistakes we have made, we all have value and something to contribute to the wellbeing of others and our community. Far too often, we are reserved to the definition of equity as the provision of additional resources for those without or in the greatest need. It is in this simplistic acceptance of the term that we find ourselves in a perpetual class system where those with assets maintain a higher hierarchical position over those perceived to have less. I challenge us to accept a more expansive definition of equity, one that is measured by the extent to which recipients are able and willing to give.

To make my case, I will reflect on lessons learned from my mother and grandmother. I will also share a story of how this has been realized in practice in my professional career. Let me begin with my grandmother, Louella. Some of the fondest memories of my childhood are of time spent with her. I can still hear her very distinct laugh that would ring throughout the house, after telling us an inappropriate joke or story. I remember watching soap operas with her and listening to her hum gospel tunes all day and night. Reflecting on her life, I never once thought that she struggled to make ends meet or that her life was hard. She cleaned houses, worked as a nanny and made very little money but we never saw ourselves as poor while in her care. Without pausing, she would always make sure that we had what we needed and knew that she loved us. My grandmother gave of herself so freely, generously, and graciously, even though she had extraordinarily little to give. I honestly believe that her peace and happiness was predicated on her ability and willingness to give. She was always absolutely clear that she wanted nothing in return and was insulted if you attempted to reciprocate the gesture. I also believe that as she got older, her ability to give became difficult and that challenged her core purpose, which was to be of value to others. In her latter days, she would say, "Damon, I feel so unnecessary." She would say this frequently, but I now understand that being taken care of and no longer

being able to do that for others tore her apart. Her purpose in life was to care for and support others. Her ability to give was what drove her, and it is her giving spirit that has guided me in my work today. She did not have much to give, but her passion for giving was a powerful force in her life.

For my mother, being the beneficiary of the generosity and resources of others was demoralizing and difficult to accept. I remember at a very young age, riding with my mother, Renee, to the social services office to pick up food stamps, peanut butter, dry milk and cheese. I can still see the frowned-up scowl on my mother's face each time we stood in line and walked out with this government support. She despised the fact that she had to depend on the government to support her family and for me, it was the only time I felt less than someone else. Over time, I noticed that she began giving those food items to friends, extended family members and neighbors. She would tell me not to eat anything that we brought back from social services. I never asked why and eventually I understood what she was doing. She was using this season of dependency as motivation to not only work harder to move her family forward, but she was also recreating a sense of self-worth by giving those resources to others who needed them just as much if not more. Being able to give to others is a blessing and she taught me that in doing so, we are in turn blessed tenfold. That blessing came in the form of her acceptance to college. Over the course of the next few years, my mother completed a degree in social work, ended her need for public assistance and began providing a valuable service to our community. She too, as was the case with my grandmother, is driven by a passion for giving, serving and supporting others.

Equity is achieved by ensuring that once we all have what we need, we are willing and able to contribute the best of who we are back into the world.

Again, equity isn't simply achieved by giving what's needed to those without. Equity is achieved by ensuring that once we all have what we need, we are willing and able to contribute the best of who we are back into the world. Equity is achieved when regardless of our socio-economic status, we are invigorated by the power of giving and uplifting others. Giving should not perpetuate patronizing or patriarchal systems of power but support the bringing forth of gifts that we all have, realized and unrealized. Early in my career, I was taught this lesson by parents of youth at the local Boys & Girls Club where I worked at the time. To this day, I am reminded of this in my role as Executive Director at Peter Paul. How do we serve or give in ways that empower the recipients to do the same? That question was answered for me by the Boys & Girls Club parents during our annual Thanksgiving dinner event.

Each year, the staff and volunteers from outside of the community would plan, sponsor and host this event for our families. Each year, the event was well attended and afterwards, we all patted ourselves on the back for having carried out another event for our families. I always had a problem with such events but could not figure out exactly why I felt that something was missing or that we didn't quite accomplish the impact I had envisioned. During that year's dinner, a solution was presented by our parents. I had scheduled a guest speaker for the event, and at the last minute, he had to cancel due to a family emergency. The staff and I were scrambling to figure out how to fill this space on the program and were too flustered to figure out what to do. I stood at the podium and let the audience know that our guest speaker had canceled and that we would be back onstage with a solution. Less than a minute later, one of our parents came on stage and picked up the microphone. She began by saying to the audience that she would be the guest speaker for the evening. I had no idea what was about to transpire, but I was so glad that it did. She went on to share how thankful she was for the Boys & Girls Club and what the staff meant to her children.

She was then followed by parent after parent sharing their appreciation for the club and for each other. This went on for approximately an hour and resulted in many hugs, tears and even more laughter. This was the impact I was missing. During the dinner, we all talked about the next year's event and how they would plan and host it themselves. They didn't ask for a speaker, or for us to set up the event for them. What a disservice it was that we had not asked what they wanted or how they would like to contribute. That night, they asserted agency over their experiences and were designing how they would serve during the next event. They were just like my mother and grandmother, happy to contribute whatever meager means they could. They had given themselves the gift of self-worth and accomplishment. That is equity as I see it. **Equity is when we walk alongside, not in front of or behind. Equity is when those who are always standing take a seat so that others who are persistently held down can finally stand with pride. Equity is the sharing of power, not the evidence of one's capacity to assert it.**

Our greatest gift is the ability to give. That gift should not be reserved for the most affluent but experienced by all who have the spirit to share. A true gift has no monetary value but moves us beyond measure. How can we serve as a gift to others and our community? How can we support the gifts in others so that they too can be gifts to our society? Our assets far outweigh our deficiencies, yet we dwell on what we lack instead of giving the gift of ourselves to the world.

Damon Jiggetts

Damon Jiggetts serves as Executive Director of Peter Paul Development Center, an outreach and community center serving Church Hill. Peter Paul's core program is an intensive educational program, serving almost 400 students daily at the Center and East End elementary schools. Peter Paul's promise is to surround the East End with a unified community of support so that children thrive and reach their full potential. The long-term goal is to end generational poverty, improve academic achievement and provide the community with an array of opportunities as made available in more affluent communities.

One of Damon's proudest accomplishments is the creation of the Ujima Legacy Fund. Damon along with co-founders, Reggie Gordon and Robert Dortch, established the Ujima Legacy fund in 2013, a philanthropic effort comprised of $1,100 gifts from African American men. Since its inception, the Brothers of Ujima have awarded approximately $300,000 to worthy educational initiatives and organizations in service to the region's underserved youth.

Reparative and Equitable Practices and Partnerships

MEGHAN Z. GOUGH, PHD
Associate Professor of Urban and Regional Studies and Planning, VCU Wilder School

My vision of a racially equitable Richmond is one in which resourced institutions, such as higher education, invest in reparative and equitable practices that respect lived expertise and are built on partnerships.

As a society, we value expertise. Expertise is the skill or knowledge that emerges from experience, training or study, and it is critical to addressing complex societal concerns because it helps us understand, question, evaluate and innovate. Who we consider or see as "experts" matters because it represents the perspectives we value, and informs how we see our roles in addressing community challenges. Trained experts, including academics, have knowledge, tools and resources to address complicated issues. Context experts are people with lived experience of the situation; these experts live in the places, deal with the challenges and are (already) working toward solutions. **The problem is when we systematically elevate trained expertise gained through credentials over lived expertise.**

I felt tension between trained expertise and lived expertise for the first time after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast in 2005. This national disaster motivated the most renowned firms to provide weeks of pro bono design assistance for many communities. The hurricane literally left a clean slate in many areas, so designers established a new physical vision. Working class communities were transformed on paper through renderings of beautiful mixed-use corridors and residential areas with a new aesthetic common to coastal vacation towns. On its face, these designs were an incredible offering to the Gulf Coast communities, which had limited capacity to plan post-disaster. But there was more to the story.

I was a city planning graduate student when Katrina made landfall and was part of a university team providing technical planning assistance in Mississippi. My team felt the resistance from that initial planning and design work, and observed that the experience left communities skeptical about planners and designers from outside of their communities. So much of the designs were inappropriate because the firms were not from or familiar with the Gulf Coast, and did not incorporate local and lived knowledge about the history, culture, or physical characteristics of the region. Most residents were displaced by the hurricane to other cities, so only those with considerable resources to return for this planning event could participate in the charrettes and public meetings. In the end, none of the design schemes developed by these out-of-state firms were implemented; local residents and officials simply called them "pretty pictures"—beautiful renderings of a wealthy coastal community, which was not *their* community.

Despite all of the classroom learning, this was where I learned that those with degrees and certifications are not the only—or even the primary—experts in community planning and decision-making. Little did I know then that I would spend my career as a university professor continuing to wrestle with the tension between trained expertise and lived expertise in my teaching and research.

I accepted a faculty position in Urban and Regional Planning and Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government Affairs, primarily because VCU was among the few urban public research universities that was also classified as community-engaged, which means that community engagement is institutionalized into VCU'S mission, identity and commitments. VCU was a national leader in

community engagement, and had built infrastructure to support the development of responsible community-university partnerships.

VCU, like other public research universities, was established with a civic mission to develop knowledge that could enhance the economic and social conditions in communities and to prepare students to play an active role in a diverse, democratic society. Despite universities' efforts, many lack the infrastructure required to build mutually beneficial community partnerships that result in tangible benefits for the surrounding residents. It is time for higher education to renew this civic mission and do the hard work of self-reflection: How are we teaching students to understand and play active societal roles toward racial justice? Are we succeeding in developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities?

As a white, female academic working at a large, urban public research university in Richmond, Virginia, I regularly critique my role and responsibility as a researcher and teacher, training (mostly white) city planning students to work with and serve (mostly Black) communities. Although racial and ethnic diversity has increased among university professors, there is still an imbalance between faculty and students. As a profession, urban planning is still exceedingly white, raising the importance of assessing the role of whiteness in planning education, and what that means for how we have been advocating, teaching, engaging, and planning for equitable cities.

My dual role as a professor and a planner accentuates the importance of problematizing the profession's history of swooping in to initiate, fix or otherwise address community issues without first understanding the community context and engaging with lived expertise.

My dual role as a professor and a planner accentuates the importance of problematizing the profession's history of swooping in to initiate, fix or otherwise address community issues without first understanding the community context and engaging with lived expertise. Co-production of knowledge and humility need to be a critical part of shifting planning's approach to power. As we rethink our roles and responsibilities, we should invest in reparative and equitable planning practices that include 1) acknowledging structural racism as a societal problem; 2) prioritizing lived expertise; and, 3) building long-term and mutually-beneficial partnerships:

Acknowledge Structural Racism as a Societal Problem

We need to acknowledge, teach and address policies that have reproduced structural racism in our communities, including Richmond. In 2018, when Rothstein's *The Color of Law* was published, I used it in my classroom. Although I had previously taught about policies that racially segregated our cities, this book pulled together in one place the evidence of these policies and their impact on racial segregation. When my students read the book, they felt a lot of emotions, but one that was consistent across white, Black and brown students was outrage; how could they have not known the extent of this systematically imposed racial segregation? What followed was an honest and hard discussion, which some white students characterized as uncomfortable. This was an important *first* conversation, one which students referred to and built upon as they started to "see" how the legacy of structural racism is imprinted in our streets, parks and neighborhoods. The discomfort started to dissipate in their second, third and ongoing conversations, and it was replaced by the beginnings of a collective determination to redress the harms of urban planning.

Reparative and Equitable Practices and Partnerships

Our perspectives are shaped by our experiences, but also by what we learn. We have a responsibility to learn, teach and acknowledge urban history—generally, and the specific ways that racist policies have excluded communities of color in Richmond from homeownership, wealth-building opportunities, and access to educational resources, jobs and healthy neighborhoods. We need to continue to acknowledge the racist legacies of our universities and institutions, and confront their roles in enforcing systems of oppression. It may feel uncomfortable, especially for white people who are trying to reconcile their roles in this history. But there is important learning to be done as we wrestle in this discomfort, seeking to emerge better equipped to help plan for racially just cities.

Prioritize Lived Expertise

Better decisions are made when they are informed by both trained expertise and lived expertise. This truth was evident when my planning studio class was asked to work with North Highland Park on a Quality of Life Plan in 2011. In our first meeting with community advisory board members, we spent time discussing what "quality of life" meant for residents. My students noted that many of the ideas they were eager to share—based on best practices they had researched—were not consistent with what they heard from residents that day. At the time, Highland Park was not interested in bike lanes or green walls, but about public safety, employment opportunities and youth empowerment. My class had to pivot quickly that day, letting go of preconceived ideas, and pursuing new options based on what we learned from residents.

In addition to community-university relationships, prioritizing lived expertise is also relevant for other institutions with decision-making power. Trained and lived expertise can work together in a complementary, and not hierarchical, relationship. RVAgreen 2050, the City of Richmond's equity-centered climate action and resilience planning initiative, adopted a structure that prioritized (and compensated) experts with lived experience, and used their knowledge as a guide for establishing plannning goals. In this initiative, trained experts offer data, access to research, and synthesis of information that can be shared with the community, while experts with lived experience identify priorities, local history, and trauma that is critical for informing decisions.

Build Long-term and Mutually-Beneficial Partnerships

As a resourced institution, higher education must model sharing power as knowledge-builders for our students. If we want to use research to support community priorities, we must commit to building infrastructure that supports long-term relationships with the community instead of rushing into a community, eager to contribute, fix or otherwise do their work, and then leave. It is through partnerships that we can realize more effective and equitable outcomes for community challenges. But inequitable power dynamics often make long-term community partnerships difficult to sustain and inequities even harder to redress.

It is through partnerships that we can realize more effective and equitable outcomes for community challenges.

As of this writing, Richmond does not have strong examples of the long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships that are necessary to support an equitable city. But we *can* work toward building them if we are led with intention as opposed to leaning on established or institutionalized ways of doing things. Based on my experience, research and teaching, partnerships need to start with humility and a willingness to learn from each other. They demand time and resources: initially, to establish relationship, trust, and learn about others' goals and needs; and then as an on-going manner to support idea generation, implementation, dissemination of work. And, just like any relationship, partnerships need frequent communication, compassion, and adjustments here and there to thrive.

Conclusion

A racially equitable Richmond is possible only through the investment of many. Among others, city planners, universities and other anchor institutions have an important role to play in eliminating racism in their internal systems, policies, and structures, but also in their practices of interacting with and valuing the expertise in the community. As part of this, white people and institutions need to use their power, privilege and resources to help dismantle systems of oppression. *A racially equitable Richmond invests in reparative and equitable practices that respect lived expertise and are built on partnerships.* It will demand intention, possible discomfort, and a willingness to make mistakes, learn and adjust.

Meghan Z. Gough

Meghan Z. Gough is an Associate Professor of urban and regional studies and planning at Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. Her work emphasizes civic capacity building and planning for more livable and equitable communities. Meghan's contributions to research help to elevate the importance of community-based decision-making and partnerships in the development of plans and policies to support sustainable community development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Peace for Communities of Color: A Conversation Between a Black Woman and a White Woman on Shifting Power and the Need for Radical Imagination in the Nonprofit Sector

LEA WHITEHURST-GIBSON AND BEKAH KENDRICK

Equity for Richmond requires a culture shift within the nonprofit and philanthropic sector, including the following:

- **Power shifting** by puting the ability to change unjust systems in the hands of the people who are directly impacted. They should be designing the solutions to the issues they have themselves identified.
- **Trusting people of color** to reimagine, implement solutions effectively, and allocate resources is a significant part of moving things forward.
- **Reimagining community engagement and decision making** by creating and holding space for people of color to step into their power as leaders.
- **Embracing new and Courageous Fundraising Principles**, inspired by the Community-Centric Fundraising movement.

Reframing Equity—The Gift of Being a Giver

DAMON JIGGETTS

Equity is when those perceived as having little power, resources or gifts can give of themselves in ways that are not only meaningful to someone else or community, but evokes a sense of pride, self-worth, and value in themselves.

Strategies to support this paradigm of equity:

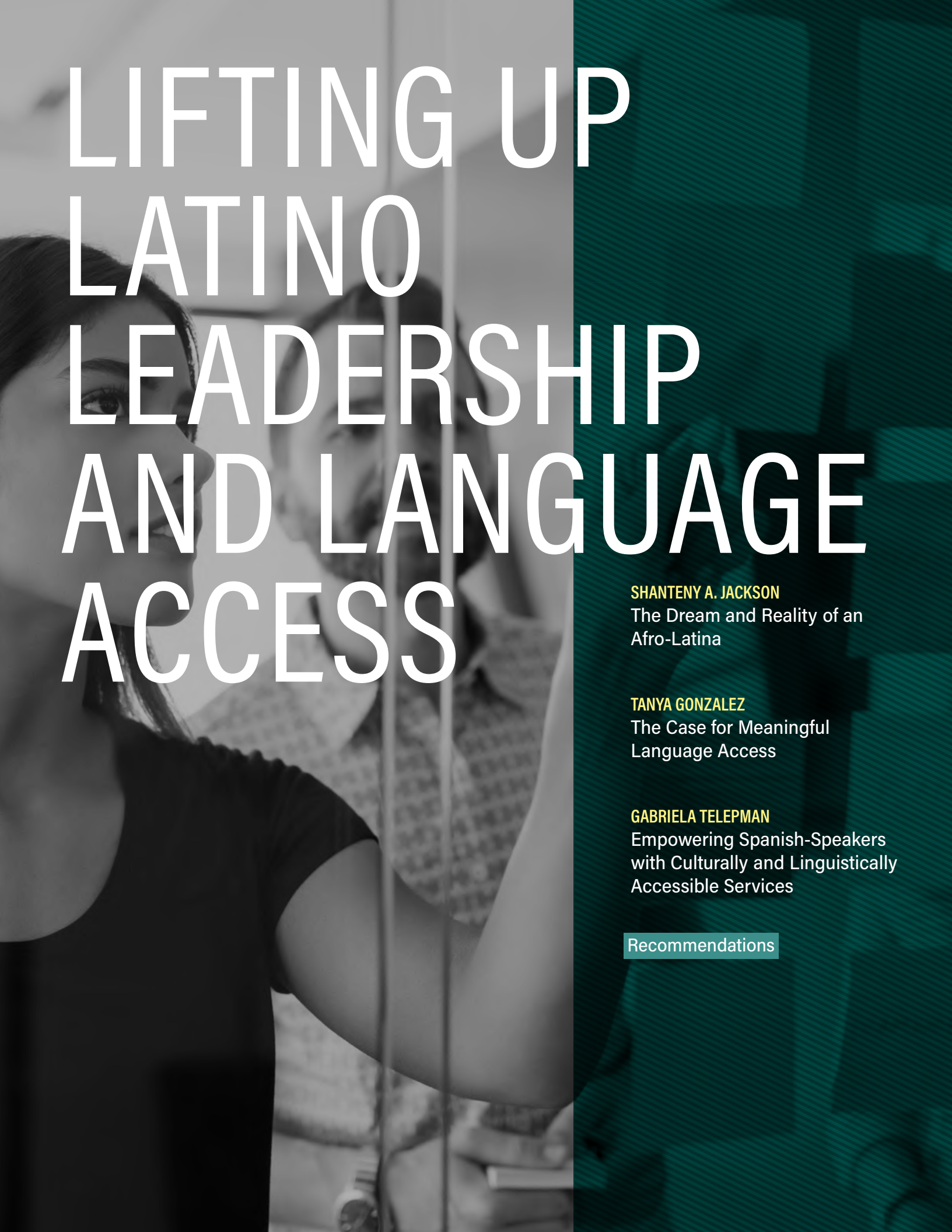
- Recognition that everyone has value and something to contribute.
- Walking alongside, not in front of or behind others.
- Those who are always standing take a seat so that others who are persistently held down can finally stand with pride.
- Sharing of power, not the evidence of one's capacity to assert it.

Reparative and Equitable Practices and Partnerships

MEGHAN Z. GOUGH, PHD

We should invest in reparative and equitable planning practices that include:

- Acknowledging structural racism as a societal problem;
- Prioritizing lived expertise; and,
- Building long-term and mutually-beneficial partnerships.



LIFTING UP LATINO LEADERSHIP AND LANGUAGE ACCESS

The Dream and Reality of an Afro-Latina
El Sueño y la Realidad de una Afrolatina

SHANTENY A. JACKSON
Certified Bilingual Community Health Worker Senior, Richmond City Health District

As an Afro Latina and community leader, I have witnessed massive power inequities and disproportionate access to social, economic, and cultural resources. First, the lack of representation of Latino and Afro Latinos in professional roles within government, nonprofit and private institutions is terrifying. Second, Latinos and Afro Latinos are often absent from leadership roles and decision-making opportunities, which creates generational gaps and identity imbalances. Third, it is extremely discouraging to participate in diversity and inclusion programs because follow through is short lived. Fourth, we need to emancipate Latino and Afro Latinos from the bondage of leading from behind. Instead of placing non-Latino individuals in leading roles to represent Latino communities, we need to allow them to lead and make decisions for Latinos by Latinos; this is essential to tackling social disparities and fortifying representation for us.

Historically, Latinos come from many different parts of the world. We have unique physical characteristics and diverse cultural experiences. Although some people think Afro Latinos are anomalies, Afro Latinos represent 24% of the entire U.S. Hispanic or Latino population. The African diaspora and ancestral roots are immanent reflections of rich cultural and multiracial characteristics. Our physical appearance, skin color, cuisine, dance, religious and ceremonial practices contribute to the numerous racial identities and cultural dimensions of being Latino.

I consider myself a Richmonder, though I am not a native Virginian. I have spent over twenty years in this state; Richmond is my home away from home. It was through hard work and perseverance that I was able to survive. Thus, I appreciate the privilege and hospitality that Richmond has given me and my family. Furthermore, most people learn about my "Afro Latinidad" through conversations. My heavily accented English creates a polarity between race and culture. Soon after it has been realized, the next immediate question I get is "Where are you from?" *As if someone can't be from another country or culture and be a Richmonder.* My racial experiences in Richmond have been filled with mixed emotions. I say this because I had to learn to assertively navigate and advocate for myself while dually representing my Latino community, in order to be heard and seen.

Another interesting aspect in my Richmond experiences relates to the challenges Latinos encounter with local segregation. I have lived in communities where Blacks, whites, and other diverse populations commune in their own siloed spaces. Success is often measured by entering privileged networks and spaces or the forgoing "red tape" and unsaid rules even within established Latino circles. As we know, these situations create unnecessary barriers and stressors, which perpetuate division, distrust, and isolation. We need to work harder to unify our communities because failing to create a holistic sense of community costs us opportunities for both organic immersion and meaningful integration.

The general population identifies me as African American or Black. However, once my Afrolatinidad is disclosed in conversations, the narrative changes to a more inquisitive one. Where my blackness is questioned with the statement, "I thought you were Black." My response is, "I am Black! I just happen to be a Black Latina." Unironically, there are a lot of misconceptions about Latinos. Stereotypes and cultural misconceptions against Latinos are rapidly spreading and gaining popularity including any Latino heritage derived from white, black, or indigenous

descendants. The Center for Public Integrity reported one of the most common misconceptions about Latinos is that "all Latinos are immigrants."

The negative impact that this type of misinformation has in communities is evident by the increase of hate speech, demonizing rhetoric, and criminalization of Latinos. The FBI also noticed a surge in hate crimes between 2018 and 2020. Communication outlets such as radio and community partners came together to openly protest these abuses and to offer solutions to confront, educate, and correct the racial misconceptions that promoted such attacks. In the words of a hate crime victim: "It doesn't matter if I become an American citizen, if your skin color is not white and your, English is not perfect, you do not blend." While I recognize that Richmond is not the exception, Latinos and Afro-Latinos here are also victims of microaggression. Personally, I have heard very hurtful words about Latinos, particularly during the pandemic. We are blamed for spreading the virus at construction sites or just going to the supermarket with our children. I have witnessed racial profiling conducted by police where a man was pulled over because of his "Mexican" appearance. The man was forced to show his "vehicle registration" and subsequently questioned about "his legal/illegal status."

The solutions are simple: create culturally sensitive spaces for dialogue and celebration of Latino ancestry, history and culture, promote leadership that reflects the community being served and establish equitable distribution of power.

A great investment would be to develop a Latino Cultural Center that serves as a catalyst for the preservation, development, and promotion of Latino and Afro-Latino arts and culture.

Cultural Sensitivity and Celebration

Culturally diverse communities welcome and celebrate differences. They also provide culturally sensitive resources that inform communities of ways to manage and resolve conflict and foster collaboration. An equitable Richmond invests in infrastructures to support communities and celebrate differences. A great investment would be to develop a Latino Cultural Center that serves as a catalyst for the preservation, development, and promotion of Latino and Afro-Latino arts and culture. The Latino Cultural Center would lay the foundation to an inclusive environment that would also welcome communities that do not identify in the culture to learn and engage. This Latino Cultural Center would help to foster meaningful dialogue and cultural understanding of Latino (a/x) and Afro-Latino communities.

Representative Leadership

Local representation would look like electing [Afro] Latinos in City council positions or greater hiring within local government and nonprofits with intentionality in order to effectively address community issues such as poverty, close generational wealth gaps, and encourage job, housing, and health stability.

Latino leadership is seldom an organic process. Not to mention, Afro Latino leadership. It is rare to see Afro-Latinos in leadership roles. In my twenty-one years of living in Richmond, I have only met three Afro Latinos in leadership positions. When speaking on gender, I have seldom seen Afro Latinas in leadership roles. I have always wondered, why do we allow other races to speak about Latino experiences? How can we build our leaders if Latinos and Afro Latinos are not given the proper space and power to lead?

The Dream and Reality of an Afro-Latina El Sueño y la Realidad de una Afrolatina

Identity and leadership are analogous in communities of color because they are the survival mechanisms for the rising generations. Having connections and commonalities with a leader creates a sense of identity, hope and/or admiration. I feel the same way when I see Celia Cruz. Although she was a musical icon, her image always evoked pride in me as she wore her Afro Latina identity with valor. How about the image portrayed in public spaces? Does the Latino prototype resemble our diverse culture? with "fair" or light skin and "good" or "straight" hair? Where are the autochthonous, browned skin, and curly haired people? Do they not exist? Are we replacing them with "lighter" versions of Latinos? Are Latinos maintaining the "status quo" by perpetuating the same problematic and colonists' values from other cultures?

Having connections and commonalities with a leader creates a sense of identity, hope and/or admiration.

These images we are reinforcing are of extreme relevance for Latinos (as/x) and Afro Latinos (as) in leadership and representation. I believe more Afro-Latino representation is critical to the positive development and growth of our communities. Richmond would be a better place if we developed infrastructures that promoted Latino and Afro Latino leadership. These leadership roles would encourage equitable racial representation and identity models for our current and future generations.

Equitable Distribution of Power

The average Richmond Latino works a blue-collar job and earns an hourly wage. The Labor and Statistics Bureau reports that Latinos are ranked highest in labor force participation and among men/teens. Inequities in hiring create barriers to income opportunities for Latinos including access to promotions impeding upward mobility and diversity into leadership roles. Moreover, Afro-Latinos are seldom chosen to hold positions of power. It has been my experience that once Latinos and Afro-Latinos achieve some level of power, they are scrutinized and questioned about their decisions where otherwise non-Latino/POC identities are applauded or revered for the decisions that they make. If you are Latino in a space of power, you are obviously a minority. In terms of equitable distribution of power, Richmond would benefit from making intentional efforts to cultivate greater Latino leadership in the nonprofit, business and government arenas, while also eliminating any bias and barriers. We need not just rely on a token few that hold positions to be the primary voices for the community. Those individuals exercising "chronic" privilege should be accountable to the "power" monopoly. We should all look to expand the Latino leadership base so that the voice and presence of Latinos in our community is adequately heard and represented.

In conclusion, an equitable Richmond would be a place where Latinos and Afro-Latinos can thrive in terms of cultural celebration, leadership and power. Richmond would be a city that works well for the seven percent of the population in Richmond that are Latino.

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El Sueño y la Realidad de una Afrolatina
The Dream and Reality of an Afrolatina

Soy parte de dos mundos – I am part of two worlds.

Dos mundos de colores diferentes – Two worlds of different colors

Soy Latina y a la misma vez Africana – I am Latina and African

Hablo español e ingles – I speak Spanish and English.

Mis compañeros latinos me ven como "negrita, morenita, morena, negra" –
My Latino peers see me as "negrita, morenita, morena, negra"

En cambio, en Richmond soy "African-American o Black"
Instead, in Richmond I am seen as "African American or Black"

¿Pero, será que pertenezco a estas identidades o me obligo a encajar? –
But, do I fit into these identities, or do I just squeeze myself in to fit?

En Richmond no he encontrado representación idónea de mi cultura ni mi imagen -
In Richmond, seldom do I find representation of my values, image, and culture.

Mi identidad está perdida en las esperanzas de una "típica" Latina –
My identity is lost in the hopes of the "stereotypical" Latina.

alguien que refleja una identidad y que imita a un grupo muy diferente, al mío -
someone who reflects the identity or tries to represent a person that does not look like me.

un grupo de tez "blanca" y cabello "lacio" – a person with "fair skin" and "straight" hair

En cambio: - Instead

Yo soy un orgullo Afro -Latino – I am a proud Afrolatina

de cabellos rizos y tez oscura – with curly hair and dark skin

¿Será que podemos hacer algo para cambiar la trayectoria en que nos direccionamos?
Can we change the trajectory of our actions?

¿O nuestro destino está predispuesto? Or is our destiny already written (or predestined)?

¿Podremos reflejar nuestra identidad afrolatina en lugares de liderazgo o poder?

Can we relate or identify with those in places of power and leadership?

The Dream and Reality of an Afro-Latina El Sueño y la Realidad de una Afrolatina

¿O solo es para aquellos que tienen el "color adecuado"?

Or is it exclusive to those of the "right color"?

¿Qué esperanzas tendrán las generaciones venideras?

What hope and legacy are we leaving to the next generations?

¿O no tienen opciones? - Do they have options?

Shanteny A. Jackson

Shanteny A. Jackson is an Afro-Latina. Mrs. Jackson embodies a multifaceted life. Professionally, she leads the Virginia Community Health Worker Association and works for Richmond City Health District as a Health Educator Senior.

She holds a master's degree in Counseling and Human Services with a concentration in Addictions. She is a proud alumnus of the Community Trust building Fellowship, Ginter Urban Gardener Program, Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, and Circles USA.

Mrs. Jackson is known as a compassionate collaborator and community advocate. Her strong background in community engagement and organizing serves as a foundational asset in her career.

Personally, Mrs. Jackson enjoys outdoor activities, swimming, volleyball, and soccer. She strives and promotes values of inclusion and leadership in communities of color.

The Case for Meaningful Language Access

TANYA M. GONZÁLEZ, M.P.A.
Executive Director, Sacred Heart Center

Through my work in the Richmond area for the last twenty years, I have dedicated my career to welcoming immigrant families, starting at Refugee and Immigration Services, then through the City of Richmond Office of Multicultural Affairs, and for the last five years, through Sacred Heart Center, where we connect Latino families with tools to thrive and flourish. I have seen first-hand the growth of the immigrant community in the Richmond area, and have been an integral part of the services in place intended to assist families in their adjustment to their new home. My key point that I am sharing is simply this: **the Richmond metropolitan area needs a comprehensive immigration integration policy that centers language access services and that is implemented by localities, nonprofits, and other human service providers to begin to move towards racial equity for immigrant families.** This essay presents a case through the lens of public policy for developing such a policy. However, in considering our shared humanity, and the moral case for providing meaningful language access service, I also offer the following paraphrased sentiment, attributed to Nelson Mandela: "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart."[1]

Migration Trends

In general, migration around the world is a constant, and the United Nations estimates that in 2005, "191 million people lived outside their country of birth, a figure that has doubled since 1975 and continues to rise."[2] At the beginning of the twenty-first century, about one in eight residents in the United States, or 13%, were foreign born.[2] This growth in the foreign-born population has implications for families through second and further generations. Children residing with at least one immigrant parent accounted for 24% of children under age 18 in 2010.[3] This growing diversity brings with it many benefits, as well as challenges, as is exemplified by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan in Beyond the Melting Pot where it was stated, "The point about the melting pot is that it did not happen."[4] In other words, diverse immigrants to the U.S. do not all assimilate and create one cohesive "American" identity.

Another key migration trend that has impacted our community here locally is that we have seen more immigrants moving to states that have historically not had the experience or infrastructure to promote integration. This has been the case in Virginia, and, more specifically, in the Richmond metropolitan area. Over the last two decades, the foreign born population in Virginia and in the metropolitan Richmond area has increased exponentially, going from 1 in 100 people in 1970 to 1 in 9 in 2012, based on University of Virginia research.[5] In considering the possible barriers that exist in accessing services by these diverse immigrant groups in localities that have not traditionally had the infrastructure to serve them, language proficiency is a prominent hurdle. Of the foreign-born population in each locality, a large portion has limited English proficiency. According to the Migration Policy Institute, Henrico County has 16,400 Limited English Proficient (LEP) people, or 5.8% of its total population, and the primary languages spoken in descending order are Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, and Hindi. Chesterfield County has 12,700 LEP people, or 4.3% of its total population, and the primary languages spoken in descending order are Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese. The city of Richmond has 8,800 LEP people, or 4.6% of its total population, and the primary language spoken is Spanish.[6] While language access services have been slowly improving here in the

Richmond area since I first began working with immigrant families in 2000, I believe that we have a ways to go to truly achieve racial equity in this area, as available services through different localities and nonprofits in the area are disparate and sometimes nonexistent.

Immigrant Integration

Once immigrants are in the U.S., regardless if services are adequate or not, the complicated process of immigrant integration, which is multifaceted and multilayered, begins to occur. Because immigration integration policies around the U.S., as well as locally here in the Richmond area, are more ad hoc and piecemeal, disparities emerge, in terms of access to services by immigrant families. Children that live in Richmond City, for example, may have different access to English language instruction and supports than in Chesterfield or Henrico. Families that live in Henrico may have less access to interpreters than in Richmond City or Chesterfield, when accessing health and human services. These disparities directly impact medical care, education, and many other critical aspects of daily life. In addition, immigrant integration should involve both the arriving communities and the receiving communities working together in dynamic ways to engage and transform all community members. When immigrant integration does not occur as a two-way process, immigrant communities can be isolated, segregated, and disparities increase. Communities are pitted against each other and may even compete for what are seemingly limited resources.

Where there is a language barrier, there is no information and no service provision, effectively isolating individuals in the community and obliterating the possibility of racial equity.

Language Access

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act states that, "no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."[8] The Supreme Court decided in the 1974 court case Lau v. Nichols that a federal fund recipient's denial of an education to a group of non-English speakers violated Title VI and resulted in discrimination.[7] The Supreme Court thus interpreted Title VI to include "discrimination based on language as equivalent to national origin discrimination"[8]. In short, legally, because of Title VI, all entities that receive federal funding must provide meaningful language access services.

Where there is a language barrier, there is no information and no service provision, effectively isolating individuals in the community and obliterating the possibility of racial equity. An example of this effect of communities being isolated, in my opinion, was shown through the disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Latinx families in the Richmond area, with translated information being delayed or sometimes not available during the first few months of the pandemic. This lack of language access services, in addition to other reasons, has resulted in the devastating impact of COVID-19 on area Latinx families. Ultimately, providing meaningful access to services for all people, regardless of the language spoken, will improve racial equity by allowing "immigrants to participate in society at the same level as native citizens."[9]

Some of the general components of language access services include: hiring bilingual employees; providing translation (written) and interpretation (verbal) services; providing the translation of important applications and websites; and establishing language access offices.[10] Having bilingual staff allows agencies to communicate with their constituents in a more direct manner.[10] When bilingual employees are limited or not an option, providing quality translation and interpretation services allow agencies to communicate with their constituents in spite of the limited bilingual staff.[10] However, care must be used in selecting interpreters and translators as these are skills that require

several highly specialized competencies, in addition to language competence in both languages, so as to ensure that the communication is accurate.[9]

Creating a Comprehensive Plan for Immigrant Integration in Richmond

In the metropolitan Richmond area, where some disparate language access services exist at the local level, but no comprehensive immigrant integration policies currently exist, a first important recommendation for area localities is to develop a comprehensive immigrant integration plan at the executive level of each municipality, particularly where none exists. Ideally, local Richmond area governments would collaborate together on the components and on the implementation of their plans.

Guiding Principles

Several guiding principles can frame the development of that policy for immigrant families and the receiving communities.

- Promoting the social and economic mobility of immigrant families; most notably vulnerable groups such as refugees and limited English speakers;
- Advancing antidiscrimination principles that treat immigrant family members on a par with citizen family members;
- Promoting intergovernmental fiscal equity regarding collecting taxes from, and providing support to, newcomer populations;
- Leveraging the capacity and support of the private sector; and
- Acknowledging that integration is a bidirectional process involving both the immigrant family and receiving community adaptations.[11]

Recommendations

With these guiding principles that have as their undercurrent racial equity for immigrant populations in mind, several concrete strategies can be recommended to localities in the Richmond area, using national models as input. Many of these recommendations could also be implemented by area nonprofit and other public service organizations.

- Create a language access policy and implementation plan that outlines procedures and protocol, monitor and ensure Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is adhered to at the customer service level in all local departments.
- Commit to staff training on immigrant eligibility for services, working with interpreters and translators, and cultural awareness training for the populations that have larger percentages represented in each locality.
- Commit to bilingual staff training for all staff members that are currently performing the role of interpreter or translator in addition to their other regularly assigned duties.
- Develop and implement a plan, if one does not already exist, to effectively notify LEP clients of their eligibility for benefits, programs, and language access services that are available to them.
- Use technology to facilitate language access service delivery through telephonic systems, such as language line, and other tools.
- Implement an evaluation system in order to monitor progress, along with a timeline for adjusting the services and programs according to the outcomes.

The Case for Meaningful Language Access

An immigrant integration policy adopted by all area localities, along with a robust language access service program will assist both the service providers and the immigrant community here in the Richmond area to better understand and access available services and programs. In addition, ensuring effective access to available services will improve the overall health of immigrant families and, ultimately, of the entire community. The benefits that the local language access policies can bring to the community are apparent, recognizing that contributing to the health and safety of immigrant families, results in advancing racial equity for a segment of the population that can sometimes be isolated and excluded by the very systems that should be welcoming newcomers to their new home.

While several area localities are doing some language access services, I believe that there is still a missed opportunity to implement a more comprehensive and strategic immigration integration approach. Even after twenty years of work, I think that language access continues to be an uncultivated public policy issue in the Richmond area. Unless real racial equity gains are advanced in this area, we may continue to ask, as James Baldwin did many years ago, "How much time do you want for your progress?"[12]

Tanya M. González

Tanya M. González holds a Bachelor's Degree in Latin American Studies from Brown University and a Master's in Public Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University. Ms. González joined the Sacred Heart Center as theExecutive Director in July 2016. She grew up on the Texas-Mexican border and has lived in Richmond for twenty-six years. She has almost 20 years' experience in working with and for Richmond's Latino community. Ms. González is a graduate ofLeadership Metro Richmond and the Connecting Communities Fellowship Program,as well as the Minority Political Leadership Institute. She was previouslythe recipient of the Ohtli award, given by the Mexican government to recognize individuals for their service to the Mexican community in the United States. Ms. González was also recognized as one of "Richmond's Top 40 under 40" by Style Magazine in 2005 and received the Leadership Metro Richmond Ukrop Community Vision Award in 2015. In 2018, she received the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities Humanitarian Award, and in 2020, she was recognized as a Richmond History Maker by the Valentine Museum. In her free time, Ms. González coordinates a dance group at the Sacred Heart Center that performs traditional Latin American and Spanish dance in the Richmond area.

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"Si, yo Hablo Español": Empowering Spanish-Speakers with Culturally and Linguistically Accessible Services

GABRIELA TELEPMAN
Community Relations Coordinator, Latinos en Virginia Empowerment Center

Growing up in Miami Florida as a Latina, I never really considered myself a "minority" because of the high population of Latinos and Spanish-speakers living there. Every sign you read and every space you enter is bilingual; that is the norm. So, when I moved to Richmond, I experienced culture shock as I noticed the lack of language diversity and representation of the Spanish language throughout mainstream and public spaces. I thought, "is this what the rest of this country is really like?" and was fueled by a strong desire to reconnect with my culture and find the Latino community in this new place. It is on this journey that I found Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center. This agency, for which I have been working over the past year, serves Spanish-speaking victims of violence in Virginia, and does so through a powerful effort of cultural and linguistic empathy. By this, I mean that they genuinely understand the people they serve from both a cultural and linguistic perspective. The systems in place that serve victims of violence, like many systemic processes spanning a variety of issues, were designed for English-speakers, by English-speakers, and center the experience on US-born "citizens." As a response, Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center was created by Latinos, for Latinos, with an emphasis on providing language justice, or an experience that is not centered around English as the dominant language, to those who are limited English proficient, non-English speaking, and most commonly, immigrants. The community-based model that this agency uses is not only appropriate, but intentional in the design of its services for the Latino population, as demonstrated by a strong attention to detail. Even its most trivial seeming characteristics, such as the office's intentional location in North Chesterfield, an area highly populated by Latinos, are a testament to this.

When Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center launched its 24/7, Statewide, Bilingual Hotline for Spanish-speaking victims of violence in January 2021, our team was filled with pride and excitement. Even I, already understanding the deficit of culturally and linguistically appropriate services for Spanish speaking victims in Virginia, was surprised to learn that this hotline would be the first of its kind in the state, and I knew that this much-needed resource would be of value to so many victims; it would even save lives. When the news broke about the launch, however, I was discouraged to find that not everyone shared my feelings of excitement. Comment sections on articles published about our hotline were filled with hate speech and criticism, questioning why this service was needed at all. One anonymous comment read, "What's the worst way to help a non-English speaker? Provide them services, etc. in their native language. How do you keep a non-English speaker from ever meeting their potential? Keep them content by spoon feeding them 'life' in the language they're comfortable with." Hiding behind their screen, this person concluded with, "I firmly believe the quickest, most effective method is via 'sink or swim'...So stop it with the life jackets!" The white supremacist ideals upheld by this misguided commentary have no place in creating an equitable Richmond. On the contrary, **an equitable Richmond is a city that recognizes the needs of the Spanish speaking population and commits to meeting those needs by providing adequate Spanish language services.** There is clearly a need for services for Spanish-speaking victims of violence because in 2020, Latinos in Virginia's hotline received a total of 427 office hours of calls, but has received 750 calls in the first 5 months of 2021 alone. In response to the above mentioned comment, victims of violence do need "life jackets;" they are literally asking for them by calling these hotlines. But these life jackets cannot be the same ones that we give to English speakers. According to the 2019 U.S. Census, roughly seven percent of Richmond's population is Hispanic/Latino.

While that number may seem small, it represents about 15,900 people. We can assume the number is even higher because there is typically low participation among underserved populations and non-English speakers. **If we want to create an equitable environment for the Latino population in Richmond, service providers must act with empathy and imbed a bilingual, bicultural, and trauma-informed approach within their organizations.**

On the language accessibility piece, the first concrete step an organization can take is developing a language access plan, or a document that spells out how to provide services to individuals who are non-English speaking or have limited English proficiency.

Act with Empathy

Imagine for a moment that your life is so tumultuous that you and your children are forced to flee your own home. Not only are you experiencing domestic violence, but your children are being exposed to it in your house, and your living conditions are not meeting the needs of you or your family. Once you leave and find a new home, while you may feel temporary relief, you feel isolated in a place filled with people who cannot understand you because they do not speak your language, and you know that your problems at home can still come back to haunt you. You're living in fear of your abuser following you and your children, and trying to come back into your lives, so you're extremely cautious about everything you do. And beyond all of this, you are trying to help your children become acclimated to a new environment. Finally, something bad does happen, and you need to call the police to come and intervene. But you cannot just call 911 — what is the appropriate emergency number here? And maybe you know just enough of the local language to ask for directions, but you also know you would not be able to communicate clearly with a police officer over the phone. You do not even know where to begin. You are panicked. You are stressed. You probably do not even pick up the phone out of fear that it will not work, or that you will mistakenly be sent back to the place you recently fled out of desperation. You need to protect your children from this, too. But imagine you do pick up the phone, and the response you hear on the other end of the line is, "I'm sorry, I don't speak English," and they hang up on you. You are left feeling even more helpless than when you began. This is how monolingual and limited English proficient Spanish speaking immigrants who are victims of violence feel in Virginia. All this upon uprooting their lives in their former homes to find better opportunities here. No matter how new and different, Richmond is now their home, and they should be able to access the same services and treatment as anyone else.

Incorporate a Bilingual, Bicultural, and Trauma-Informed Approach

After empathy comes action, and these actions should incorporate both language accessibility and cultural sensitivity to fulfill your commitment to serving Spanish speakers. On the language accessibility piece, the first concrete step an organization can take is developing a language access plan, or a document that spells out how to provide services to individuals who are non-English speaking or have limited English proficiency. In this plan, agencies can explicitly commit to making changes like translating their vital documents such as release forms and informational brochures to be available in Spanish, organizing events that have facilitators who speak Spanish, and working well with interpreters. The cultural sensitivity piece is a bit more challenging. Even with a language access plan in place, Spanish-speaking victims of violence will still face obstacles. A brochure that is translated from English to Spanish using Google translate will probably leave your target audience just as confused as they were to begin with. In this case, agencies need to work not only with professional translators, but also people from the Latino community itself to understand the appropriate language they should be using to reach their target audience. If you tell a potential

client that your agency can provide them with "Manejo de Casos" (Case Management), they may have no idea what you are talking about; break it down for them so that they know you can provide them with the services they need to overcome their situations.

Apart from agency materials, the cultural piece needs to be considered when thinking about over-the-phone services. A Spanish-speaking victim may call a domestic violence hotline that uses an over the phone interpreter as per its language access plan, and let's say it takes one minute for the caller to be put on hold while the hotline connects them to the appropriate interpreter. If you are in an emergency, a potentially life-threatening situation and you need help as soon as possible, one minute can feel like an eternity. And imagine how much courage it took the victim to call in the first place, with fear that their migratory status could be threatened. Many callers may even hang up while they are waiting. For the callers that don't hang up, they will probably still end up speaking to a remote interpreter who is unable to offer a personal connection. This is why having advocates on staff who are both bilingual and bicultural is so important. Callers want someone on the other end of the line who is not only going to understand the language they are speaking, but who is able to respond with cultural sensitivity and relate to where they are coming from, both literally and figuratively. Employing this staff can also help agencies avoid perpetuating a misunderstood idea of what "Latino culture" is that is based on generalizations and assumptions, which can be damaging to your services. The entirety of the staff at Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center is bilingual and bicultural, so when a Spanish-speaker calls our hotline, they are always able to speak to a real person who speaks their language, is trained in trauma-informed care, and can relate to what they are going through as a Latin American immigrant.

A genuine connection between staff and client served, rooted in both language spoken and cultural sensitivity, is the empathetic approach, and one that should be a model for all nonprofits, schools, and government services in Richmond. While Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center is one agency that is committed to serving Spanish-speaking victims of violence, thousands of other Spanish-speaking individuals' needs are being unmet. Creating an equitable Richmond for all would require more organizations to empower immigrant and Spanish speaking individuals through the provision of linguistically and culturally accessible services for all. In this way, bilingual services can become a norm.

Gabriela Telepman

Gabriela joined Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center in spring 2020 upon graduating from the University of Richmond with a dual-degree in Business Administration and Latin American Studies. As Community Relations Coordinator, she works to form meaningful partnerships with other organizations and service providers throughout Virginia to strengthen the collective response to the needs of Spanish-speaking victims of violence. Gabriela is originally from Miami, Florida.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Dream and Reality of an Afro-Latina *(El Sueño y la Realidad de una Afrolatina)*

SHANTENY A. JACKSON

Instead of placing non-Latino individuals in leading roles to represent Latino communities, we need to allow them to lead and make decisions for Latinos by Latinos. Selected strategies toward tackling social disparities and fortifying representation:

- **Create culturally sensitive spaces** for dialogue and celebration of Latino ancestry, history and culture.
- **Promote leadership that reflects the community being served.**
- **Establish equitable distribution of power** by expanding the Latino leadership base so that the voice and presence of Latinos in our community is adequately heard and represented.

The Case for Meaningful Language Access

TANYA M. GONZÁLEZ, M.P.A.

The Richmond metropolitan area needs a comprehensive immigration integration policy that centers language access services. Selected strategies for area local government, nonprofit and other public service organizations:

- **Create a language access policy and implementation plan** that outlines procedures and protocol.
- **Commit to staff training on immigrant eligibility for services,** working with interpreters and translators, and cultural awareness training for the populations that have larger percentages represented in each locality.
- **Commit to bilingual staff training for all staff members** that are currently performing the role of interpreter or translator in addition to their other regularly assigned duties.
- **Use technology to facilitate language access service** delivery through telephonic systems, such as language line, and other tools.

"Si, yo Hablo Español": Empowering Spanish-speakers with Culturally and Linguistically Accessible services

GABRIELA TELEPMAN

An equitable Richmond is a city that recognizes the needs of the Spanish speaking population and commits to meeting those needs by providing adequate Spanish language services. Service providers must:

- **Act with empathy.**
- **Imbed a bilingual, bicultural, and trauma-informed approach** within their organizations.
- **Empower immigrant and Spanish speaking individuals** through the institutionalization of linguistically and culturally accessible services.

CREATING COMMUNITY, HEALING AND JUSTICE

Intentionally Connecting with the Other

OSCAR F. CONTRERAS TELÓN
Program Host and Hispanic/Latino Marketing Specialist, Radio Poder 1380AM

I was only 12 years old when I moved from Guatemala to Virginia with my mom and siblings to reunite with my dad after 10 years. Everything was new to me. I remember coming out of the plane and even noticing that the air smelled different. I felt so far away from home, a stranger in a new land.

As strangers, we have to learn so much about so many things. Sometimes we have to rely on learning from others, but in doing so, we inherit their biases. I was told during my first few months in the USA to "be careful around Black people." I was not to use the word "negro," which is Spanish for black, around Black people. I had to think twice before saying something like "mis zapatos negros" (my black shoes). I was told Black people would be mad, that they were "violent" and could hurt me. I knew nothing then about the history of Richmond or the U.S., but at first, all I knew was what I was told. For the first two years, all I wanted was to go back home. I was not interested in finding out about others. I was just focused on myself.

What I know now is that the stereotypes that were communicated to me were embedded with racial prejudice and bias. We often hear negative and demeaning prejudices from various sources about other groups of people and about our own people throughout our lives. If we believe the lies and half truths about others, it will dictate how we act and react around them, thus provoking and feeding stereotypes that keep us all separated. We want to be comfortable, and accepted so we opt to stick to those we know and understand. Having no relationship is much easier than building a relationship with people different from us.

It wasn't until a few years after I moved to Richmond from Culpeper County that I began to connect with the real history and experience of Black people in America. I had the pleasure of walking the Slave Trail in Richmond. As immigrants, we often don't know this history. Our guide was explaining how the enslaved people would come out from the bottom of the boats after months to set foot in Richmond. He asked us to imagine them hearing different sounds, seeing different vegetation, smelling and breathing a different air. As I tried to imagine, it brought me back to my memory of that unfamiliar air as I came out of the plane when I was 12. My experience does not compare at all to the enslaved people, but I felt I was able to connect with them and it broke my heart even more. I was in a strange land. I did not speak English and people looked and sounded very different. This connection made me more open to building relationships.

I want to challenge other Richmonders to intentionally build relationships across people groups and have honest conversations to clear the air of any misperceptions and truly learn about each other. As a Christian, the Bible motivates me to take the challenge. Revelation 7:9 says: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." Now in Richmond, we have people from many "nations, tribes, people and languages" and I believe we are a blessed region, but we don't know what to do with the blessing. How do we connect with others?

Start Conversations Across Difference

I believe the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman illustrates the importance of starting conversation across differences . Historically, the Samaritans and Jews did not like each other. Jews would avoid going through Samaria and did not see Samaritans as equals. Jesus was probably told as a child to be careful around those Samaritans. During his ministry as an adult, Jesus was in Judea and was traveling to Galilee. He chose to go through Samaria and stop at a town called Sychar. Tired, seated by the well, Jesus saw a Samaritan woman coming to get water. Not only was she a Samaritan and a woman, she was alone and Jesus, by all cultural standards, was not to interact with her.

Instead of following tradition and expected norms, Jesus intentionally started a conversation and asked the Samaritan woman for some water. She was very surprised and quickly reminded him of the cultural precedent of mutual dislike. Nevertheless, she was brave not to follow the status quo. They began to have an honest conversation, talking about prejudice, politics, religion, personal problems, and ultimately, they opened up and built a relationship. Jesus planned to reveal himself as the Messiah to her. At one point, she asked him about where the right place was to worship. It was typical for Jews to worship in the Temple and Samaritans in the mountain. The answer to the question could elevate one group above the other. Jesus said all ought to worship God "in the Spirit and in truth." Who they were and where they were was not the emphasis, but the intention in which they worship. Soon after, he revealed himself as the Messiah. Her heart rejoiced and she ran to tell the good news to her people. In this conversation, Jesus and the Samaritan woman were able to clear the air by intentionally and openly discussing the prejudice of their people. This then opened the door for a conversation that addressed sorrow, but also brought joy and hope.

We can smile, and acknowledge each other. We can be kind and offer help. We can cry with those who cry and rejoice with those who rejoice.

Jesus knew how Jews and Samaritans felt about each other, but he did not speak negatively about Samaritans with other Jews. To the contrary, he referred to them in a positive light. One day, an expert in the Law of Moses asked Jesus, "who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers with a story where a Samaritan man was the hero. You can read the story in Luke 10:25-37 where we get the term "the good Samaritan." Jesus wanted the Jews to see beyond themselves and see the equal value in others. He challenged them not to be comfortable, but to intentionally do good to others. **As Richmonders, we need to seek out conversations, even if they are not initially comfortable, so we can learn about each other and act with compassion. This is true, especially if we find ourselves in a position of influence or privilege.**

Create Cross-Cultural Community Spaces for Joy, Healing and Sharing

One way to connect across cultures is by creating space for sharing our experiences, both the joys and struggles. About eight years ago at my church, the first year my wife and I ran Vacation Bible School (VBS), I was in charge of the adult activities. I had a group of around 25-30 people for five nights, two hours each night. Some spoke only Spanish and some only English. We worship every Sunday at the same time but in different locations in the church building. Normally, these two groups wouldn't get to see each other and share. In my church family, not speaking the same language is sometimes described as a barrier. To this I say: We can smile, and acknowledge each other. We can be kind and offer help. We can cry with those who cry and rejoice with those who rejoice. All these things do not require speaking another language or understanding a different culture. This VBS was an opportunity to be intentional. I wanted my brothers and sisters to get to know one another, make a connection, and care for each other. Each night, I had planned different games and activities for everyone to participate regardless of language or background. Even after all those years, I still see the positive results of that VBS. We made each other laugh and

we cried with each other. A Spanish-speaking woman and English-speaking man also started a special friendship. They kept it up for years. Every time they would see each other, they would approach one another with a hug. They talked even though they did not speak the same language. They managed to laugh and make many great memories just by acknowledging and being kind to one another. Though he passed away some years ago, she still speaks of him with love and admiration. Their relationship would not have been possible without the space we created at VBS.

On another night, a Spanish-speaker shared some of the pain she was going through. Tears rolling down her face, she said that she had not seen her oldest son for almost nine years since she left her home country. She did not want him growing up being an easy target for gangs to recruit him. Everyone was crying with her. We prayed for them to be together. Sometime after, when the boy was able to be reunited with his mom and siblings, both the Spanish and English-speaking congregants rejoiced as one.

In all these examples, connections and relationships were established because there was an opportunity to be together through VBS. All it took for these people to connect was an opportunity where the only agenda was to talk, listen, and share. Creating more spaces like these in our region, both religious and secular spaces, is necessary for our shared understanding and healing.

All it took for these people to connect was an opportunity where the only agenda was to talk, listen, and share.

Conclusion: Moving Towards Transformation

In my line of work as a radio host, people often ask me how to reach out to and build trust with the Latino/Hispanic communities. From my more than 15 years of experience, I tell them it takes time. They have to be willing to put in the work. Not everyone is willing to reach out unless it fits their agenda. Making a transaction with someone is not the same as building trust. It may look like you care while you get what you want, but it will not last. This type of transactional relationship ends up creating a bigger gap and resentment.

We must move beyond prejudice in our thoughts and actions and invest the time to connect with others. Doing so gives us freedom to reach out. 1 John 4:18 says, "Perfect love drives out fear." We also have to be willing to sometimes be offended by ignorant comments or actions. We must take this as an opportunity to build a bridge or be the bridge. In the Bible, it says that God made us in His image. We all need love, justice, peace and relationships. Let us not act like complete strangers. We are all humans that come in different shades. Let's get to know one another to care for each other. If we only stay with our own, we will grow apart, creating animosity and fear of the other. If we are going to create a racially equitable Richmond, let's be intentional about creating hearts as well as physical spaces and conversations that can clear the atmosphere; giving all of us a familiar air to breathe.

Intentionally Connecting with the Other

Oscar F. Contreras Telón

Oscar Contreras was born in Guatemala City, Guatemala. In 1995, he moved with his family to Culpeper, Virginia. After graduating from high school in Culpeper, he worked as an AmeriCorps volunteer with the Department of Social Services. For college, he moved to Richmond in 2004 and graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in photography and film in 2008. While pursuing his degree, he interned with the City of Richmond, working directly with Latino/Hispanic communities. He has worked as the program host and Latino/Hispanic marketing specialist at Radio Poder 1380 AM, Richmond's first Latino Christian Radio Station, since 2007.

Oscar lives in East Henrico with his wife, Rachel, and their four children. They are members of Branch's Baptist Church, where he serves as a deacon and leads a couple's class with his wife. Every Thanksgiving, for the last several years, he heads a community dinner event that provides hundreds of door-to-door meals in south Richmond. Oscar was named among the Richmond Times Dispatch's Person of the Year honorees in 2020.

Massive Resilience: An Emergent Strategy for Racial Equity in Richmond, VA

DR. RAM BHAGAT
Manager for School Culture and Climate Strategy at Richmond Public Schools;
President, The Conciliation Project

"Equity is more than access to resources; it's a deep commitment to liberation predicated on self-love, self-justice, self-healing, self-determination, and compassion for others."
Dr. Ram Bhagat

I was born two years after the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision, when the US Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional and therefore illegal. Yet, the Commonwealth of Virginia enforced a statewide policy, called Massive Resistance, to block school desegregation. As a public-school teacher with more than thirty years of experience in the classroom and an educational leader, I've witnessed and researched the impact of racial and economic segregation on students of color, particularly Black boys. When I was a relatively new teacher, I started a program, called "Afrikan Males," to counteract the inequities they face in school. They are more likely to receive harsher and more frequent discipline in school. They are less likely to graduate from high school than their peers.

The systemic failure of education in racially and economically segregated schools is directly related to racial hegemony embedded within American educational practices. Race and income predict how well students will thrive from pre-K to 12th grade. When schools are racially and economically segregated, the incidence of toxic stress, racial trauma, community violence, unhealthy learning environments, unaccredited schools, deficient curricula, substandard nutrition, and zero-tolerance discipline practices abounds. These conditions produce *social arrhythmia*—communities out of balance—where disconnection, alienation, and mistrust prevail. **To counteract the educational harms caused by racism and poverty, transformative cultural experiences designed to increase social emotional competence and eliminate racist policies are required.**

Massive Resilience

The renowned educator, Paulo Freire, contends in his classic work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, that "oppressed communities must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. They must not become perpetrators; however, through a process of self-healing, they must uplift themselves." Massive Resilience is a framework and set of practices I've developed to build resilience for challenging systemic racism based on the universal values of Ubuntu, Sawubona, and Sankofa; centered on the principles of interconnectedness*, inter-relatedness, and inter-resilience,* which collectively promote compassion, courage, and creativity.

The purpose of this culturally responsive approach to equity is to deconstruct the hierarchy of human value based on skin color. Literally, the translation for Ubuntu is "*I Am, Because We Are*," which invites a profound commitment to inter-connectedness or compassion. Likewise, the translation for Sawubona is "*I See You, We See You,*" which actually means, "I see your essence, not your clothes, or your position. By acknowledging you, I bring you into existence, just as your acknowledgement of me brings me into existence." We exist as unique and valued people insofar as "we see each other" in the context of community, which invites a profound commitment to inter-relatedness and courage. When my freedom is determined by your freedom, we must fight oppression together. Sometimes, we must go back to the past to fetch that which is useful for the future, which is the actual meaning of Sankofa. This invites a sense

of inter-resilience and creativity. The central focus of Massive Resilience is to create an on-going series of healing moments, of transformative cultural experiences, that produce a clear vision and path for Transforming Historical Harms in Virginia in general, and Richmond specifically.

The Problem of the Color Line

Our collective unhealed racial trauma in Richmond is deeply rooted in the historical harms caused by the lie of white superiority. This collective trauma continues to adversely impact the greater Richmond community as a whole. Dr. W.E.B. Dubois stated, "*The color line is the problem of the 20th century*." Yet, we can see through the ubiquitous lens of social media that racial tensions persist in the 21st century, as the traumatic effects of racial oppression permeate the entire region.

This proverbial *Color Line*, which was first described by Dr. Dubois in 1919, elucidates how the value of human life is stratified, based on skin color. Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC people) have been struggling for centuries to survive in this toxic racial milieu. The collective harm caused by decades of oppression, poverty, overwhelming racial stress, adverse childhood experiences, and induced self-loathing produces symptoms on a communal level that include but are not limited to community violence, poor academic performance, high suspension rates, mass incarceration, chronic diseases, premature and excessive deaths that disproportionately impact BIPOC people.

It's unfathomable for me to comprehend the depths of the inhumanity, narcissism, psychopathology and sociopathy that perpetuated more than 400 years of racial oppression against Black bodies, minds, and spirits.

I can only imagine what conditions must have been like for the first enslaved Africans, who were forced to live under white domination in the colony of Virginia. To have your address, name, family rituals, dignity, freedom to relate with the environment, and spiritual universe stripped away, was shocking, traumatizing, painful, and overwhelming. It's unfathomable for me to comprehend the depths of the inhumanity, narcissism, psychopathology and sociopathy that perpetuated more than 400 years of racial oppression against Black bodies, minds, and spirits.

Intra-racial Healing in Schools and Communities

Massive Resilience is formulated to promote intra-racial healing in schools and communities. Black people need a safe space to unpack the traumatic effects of systemic racism and oppression. Often, *the souls of Black folks* are not afforded the space nor "given permission" to address the traumatic effects of racism. When deep emotional wounds are not addressed within the safety of a culturally responsive social emotional environment, the effects can be detrimental and re-traumatizing. Hence, Black-on-Black [or intra-racial] healing demands that Black people reclaim their human dignity as people of African ancestry. Understanding historical trauma is essential for healing from unresolved historical grief and ongoing oppression and racial stress.

Massive Resilience provides a culturally responsive inter-disciplinary model that integrates four spheres of engagement: art, culture, education, and health and encompasses four arcs of engagement: trauma healing, restorative practices, mindfulness, and artfulness. Synergistically, these spheres and arcs invoke a renaissance of consciousness, akin to collective creativity of the Harlem Renaissance, which revolves around an Afro-Indigenous view of equity.

Strong White Allies

The belief that social status acquired from systemic oppression is a privilege can and must be counteracted through positive white allyship. This kind of allyship emerges from white people building healthy relationships with Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color through a process of interrogating racism, systems of oppression, and "whiteness." Positive Allyship involves so much more than a workshop or a class on cultural competency, good intentions or motivations by guilt and shame. It requires honesty, openness, vulnerability, yielding control, and challenging racism.

Positive allyship demands white people speak up and speak out against the lie of white superiority. Audre Lorde insists, "your silence will not protect you." In other words, an ally must be willing to acknowledge their limitations, accept responsibility for their complicity, and agree to do ally work. It takes more than a village to heal a child. We need allies whose liberation is aligned with ours. We need allies, to cross the color line and engage in the process of transforming historical harms, to be with us.

To do this, it is essential for allies to increase their racial and social awareness, particularly in the wake of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbrey, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Oscar Grant, and so many others killed by police violence. How allies show up for BIPOC people is critical. An ally acknowledges that everyone has a birthright to human dignity, affirms the personhood of BIPOC people, and acts in specific ways to support racial healing processes, where BIPOC people can share their stories and express their authentic voices. The trauma caused by the peculiar color line will not stop until a massive effort is generated to address the historical harm caused by more than 400 years of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual oppression.

Conclusion

The heart and soul of Massive Resilience is an arts-based paradigm that utilizes myriad forms of the Black Aesthetic for intergenerational trauma healing and mindfulness-based restorative practices. This emergent strategy rejects the hierarchy of human value based on skin color, defies the lie of Black inferiority, promotes the truth of Black humanity, equity of voice, racial healing, and embraces the transformative power of story as a shield for racial and social justice. We need more schools and community based organizations and spaces to support the strategy of massive resilience in order to realize the healing of Black people and communities.

We need more schools and community based organizations and spaces to support the strategy of massive resilience in order to realize the healing of Black people and communities.

As we emerge from the worst pandemic since 1918 and continue to fight the on-going epidemic of global racism, there is an urgent need for individual and communal healing. We need to do more than survive; we need to thrive and soar into the 2020's. We must create an educational system that cultivates dignity, respect, and mutual concern for all students. It takes more than a village to achieve this. We need allies whose liberation is aligned with ours. We need allies to cross the color line and engage in the process of transforming historical harms. We need allies to advocate for Massive Resilience!

Massive Resilience: An Emergent Strategy for Racial Equity in Richmond, VA

Ram Bhagat

Ram Bhagat, EdD is a longtime educator, arts innovator, peacemaker, and community healer. He was an award-winning science teacher for Richmond Public Schools and specialized in arts integration during his tenure for DC Public Schools. Currently, Dr. Bhagat is the Manager of School Culture and Climate Strategy for RPS. For the past three years, his work for the school division has centered around restorative practices in education, culturally responsive mindfulness practices in urban schools, and Reimagining In-School Suspension. Dr. Bhagat offers Mindfulness Based Restorative Practices and Trauma Responsive Engagement through yoga and communal rhythm to those seeking healing in an arts-integrated environment, guided by a visionary leader with a grounded voice, helping them feel rejuvenated and impelled to act.

When Black [Girls'] Lives Really Matter

ANGELA PATTON

CEO of Girls For A Change; Co-Author, Finding Her Voice: How Black Girls In White Spaces Can Speak Up & Live Their Truth

**"The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman.
The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman.
The most neglected person in America is the Black woman."**
Malcolm X

This quote by Malcolm X is well known by Black women in my community because it still rings true today. It is also true of Black girls, who grow up to be Black women. Black girls are one of the most untapped resources on this planet. Nationally, Black girls are nearly six times more likely to get out-of-school suspension than white counterparts and more likely to be suspended multiple times than any other gender or race of student, according to research by the African American Policy Forum and Columbia Law School's Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies. Before Black girls get a driver's license or go to prom, the school-to-prison pipeline is a significant reality. Until we value their lives and see their potential, we will never see an equitable world where we know women and women of color have proven to be our most impactful and compassionate leaders, though underrepresented.

What an Equitable Richmond Looks Like

An equitable Richmond is one where we see, hear, and celebrate Black girls. It's one where we experience Black girl "magic," and we give them every opportunity and resource to achieve and thrive. When we invest in developing resilient, confident children, we will get resilient, confident changemakers who will be Richmond's teachers, doctors, and artists.

In research for my upcoming book, I found that most Black teens encounter at least one act of discrimination every month and others experience numerous microaggressions weekly. Examples of these microaggressions vary, but I will share one example from a Girl Action Team participant and previous Chesterfield County High School student. She was told not to wear her headwrap to school despite it being an expression of her culture and heritage. After questioning the reasoning behind this rule several times and not receiving an answer, she decided to wear it in protest. That day, she started her cycle and needed a sanitary napkin from the nurses office. She was told she could not have a sanitary napkin unless she took her headwrap off. This policing of a Black girl's body because the school's

administration did not agree with her headdress is unnecessary and distracting. Girls in our Girl Action Teams experience discrimination like this regularly. In fact, one of my Girl Action Teams brought more incidents like this to the forefront in an article in Style Weekly.

Often, Black girls are silenced when they are restricted from wearing culturally appropriate hairstyles. Their feelings are disregarded when they have to constantly ask people not to touch their hair. Their bodies are hypersexualized. Their passion is criminalized and overly punished when they are vocal.

Young people spend a lot of time and energy thinking about and processing how to respond to racially charged incidents that happen in and outside of school. Could you imagine what their lives would be like if they didn't have to spend so much mental and emotional energy—daily—on racism and explaining their existence?

To realize a racially equitable Richmond, allies must flex their equity muscles to minimize these damaging experiences, while also giving Black girls space to learn and build the confidence to be their best advocates and unapologetic Black selves.

Black lives matter, broadly, when we all genuinely care about–and champion–issues in the Black community, particularly those issues that don't always impact us like homelessness, food scarcity, and Black maternal health.

When Do Black Lives Matter?

In my work, Black lives matter yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Black lives also need to matter to those who are overtly or inadvertently upholding centuries-old systems of oppression. Black lives matter, broadly, when we all genuinely care about—and champion—issues in the Black community, particularly those issues that don't always impact us like homelessness, food scarcity, and Black maternal health. Black lives matter when everyone takes the time to listen and support issues that center Black lives. Black lives matter when we all look for opportunities to lift up Black girls so they can realize their great potential and change the trajectory of their lives, their families, and entire communities. We know that supporting women and girls greatly improves communities. Black lives matter when we allow Black girls to make mistakes, learn, grow, and heal.

In our hypervisible society, Black lives have to matter beyond social media posts about a Black life taken at the hands of the police or a march broadcasted across social media. **Black lives have to matter beyond a one-and-done diversity and inclusion training; unlearning bias and racism and promoting equity are a life's work—it gets messy, you fail, you atone, try again, and you have some wins.**

Develop and Use Your Justice Muscles

So, where do you start to create change? Start by reprogramming yourself to see the value of Black lives.

- Stop seeing Black girls as stereotypes and invest in them instead.
- Value Black lives rather than disregarding or trying to silence them.
- Check yourself when, at the core, you're asking for Black people to be something other than unapologetically Black.
- Build relationships and trust with your Black colleagues, neighbors, and beyond.

- Stop having conversations and act.
- Celebrate Blackness.
- Support Black businesses.
- Have tough conversations with your white friends and family. Challenge them on their bias and racism.

The more you develop your equity muscles, the more you will create ripples of change that make waves.

Lift Up Richmond's Black Led Organizations

Black women and girl organizations are crucial to our healing and to creating equality in our city and yet they don't get the credit or support they are due. It's time that Richmond lifts them up and supports them equitably compared to the white led organizations our city tends to support. What would our schools and communities be without organizations that care about the wellbeing of Black women and girls? Organizations like Girls For A Change provide safe space and conversations, we raise money for scholarships, provide in kind donations, and social and civic services.

Building a Movement

Girls For A Change is not just an organization; it's a movement. We are building an ecosystem to support and protect Black girls here in Richmond. I invite you to help cultivate that ecosystem by supporting Black girl programs, respecting Black spaces, and supporting and volunteering at our public schools.

We know that school can be a harmful experience for a Black child. It can cause severe trauma, pushing our children out instead of drawing them in; or, it can be the tool they need to grow, develop, and flourish. I encourage parents of all races to enroll their children in the schools where they live and devote their energy to building up our Richmond public schools.

Unfortunately, right now in Richmond, white children are least likely to enroll in Richmond Public Schools. In fact, a 2018 Richmond Times Dispatch article revealed that for every 100 children born to parents living in the city, just 73 enrolled in first grade that school year. Compare that to the 135/100 in Hanover County, 92/100 in Henrico, and 115/100 in Chesterfield. Our schools will never improve if neighborhoods like North Side and Westover Hills continue to become gentrified and the schools abandoned. We need engaged, empowered, and resourceful parents willing to invest in the Richmond Public Schools where they live and not private schools miles away. This is why my husband and I have decided to enroll our daughter into a Richmond Public High School so that we can pour our energy and resources into supporting the school system.

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."
Arthur Ashe

It's easy to look at the enormous barriers to equity we call institutional racism and say, "I can't fight an entire system." The City of Richmond—once the capital of the Confederacy—has a long way to go before we see real equity and change. We need to overhaul some institutions and practices, change some laws, and vote out some politicians. Still, we will never see sustainable and lasting change if we don't do the internal work to change our perspectives, shift the narratives we allow others to tell us, and speak out against racism while also lifting and supporting the Black

community. I challenge you to support Black girls in the Richmond community—likely the most at-promise and undervalued leaders in our community.

Here are a few ways Richmond can do better by supporting Black women and girls, especially organizations that show up for them daily:

- Put resources in place that serve to cultivate Black girls—mental health, physical and nutritional, financial literacy, etc.
- Advocate for more research and funding that supports initiatives to engage Black girls in meaningful educational research that serves to explore and solve problems in their families, schools, and communities.
- Explore alternative forms of expression that showcase Black girls—like spoken word, poetry, art, drumming, storytelling, dance, theater, etc.
- Allow your children to attend schools in the neighborhoods in which you reside. You are both a resource to making things better for all.
- Stop policing Black girls' bodies, ways of dress, language, hair, nails, and words.

You can also invest in a Black girl at Girls For A Change by becoming a Hiring Partner, starting a scholarship fund, or making a donation to support our programs.

Girls For A Change, CEO, Angela Patton

As GFAC's leader, Angela is committed to "Preparing Black girls for the World…and the World for Black Girls." Angela founded Camp Diva in Richmond, Va., in 2004, to honor Diva Mstadi Smith-Roan a five-year-old who died in a firearm accident earlier that year. The program grew and went national in October 2013, when Camp Diva merged with California-based Girls For A Change (GFAC). Patton, is the CEO of the merged organization.

Angela's TED talk describing a father-daughter dance for incarcerated dads and their "at-promise" girls has been viewed over 900,000 times. She has been recognized in the local Richmond, VA press as a Top 40 under 40, in 2016 by President Obama as A White House Champion of Change for After School programming for Marginalized Girls of Color and received the Nonprofit partner of the year from the Metropolitan Business League in March 2018 . Angela is an Ambassador for who she calls "at-promise" (as opposed to "at-risk") girls and a *serial innovator*.

When she isn't inspiring change, advocating gender equality, and promoting opportunities and empowering girls, she is hanging with her family in Richmond, VA, enjoying festivals and concerts with her husband, Raymond Patton and their loving children, Imhotep and Asani.

Incarceration and Violence: Time for a Change

REV. ASHLEY DIAZ MEJIAS

Prison Isn't Working

In her book detailing the work of Common Ground, a New York-based incarceration alternative to violent crime convictions, Danielle Sered writes that there are four core drivers of violence—shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and a diminished ability to meet one's economic needs. Simultaneously, there are four key features of prison and the ways that the prison industrial complex strains Black and brown communities: shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and a diminished ability to meet one's economic needs. Sered writes, "As a nation, we have developed a response to violence that is characterized by precisely what we know to be the main drivers of violence."[1] Furthermore, incarceration fails to provide accountability or bolster public safety. The very structure of incarceration prevents reckoning with the human impact of harms. And studies have demonstrated what's known as the Prison Paradox —our rise in incarceration rates have had a zero to negative impact on our overall community safety. Decreased violent crime rates come from aging populations and increased access to employment, education, and other social services, not from higher incarceration rates.

It seems a change is long overdue—and we are having public conversations about equity and incarceration, but the focus, by elected leaders and the general public alike, is mostly on low-level, nonviolent offenders. We are moved —rightly—by stories of wrongful convictions and offenders who are locked away with extreme sentences for small crimes. Our sensibilities turn, however, when it comes to those who have committed the harms we'd rather not talk about—the violent offenses that are difficult to understand. Something about these offenses makes us unable to apply compassion or indignation about the collateral injustices of incarceration.

But if we, as a nation and as a local community, are serious about addressing the lasting harms of mass incarceration and reducing our prison population, and if we are serious about accountability and public safety, we have to address the relationship between incarceration and violence. We have to admit that, "*we cannot incarcerate our way out of violence*." As the "single blunt instrument" for dealing with violent crimes, incarceration acts only as a powerful reproductive agent for racialized trauma and mass incarceration.

Jabar

In my work with young folks at Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center, with the Richmond Community Bail Fund and at other facilities in the area, I've seen lengthy incarcerations act in traumatic and reproductive ways in response to violent offenses. Nowhere have I seen this more conspicuously than in the systemic response to my young friend, Jabar Taylor.

When he was 15 years old, Jabar was convicted of 2 counts of second degree murder, malicious wounding, and criminal solicitation, all stemming from a large fight that broke out in the early morning hours of July 20, 2015 at a Cook-Out in Fredericksburg, VA. During the court proceedings, the prosecuting attorney, who was running for commonwealth's attorney, advocated for sentencing beyond the statutory guidelines and encouraged the judge to ignore the mountains of adolescent brain science confirming that children are constitutionally different from adults in their culpability. The judge agreed, and gave the teenaged Jabar a virtual adult life sentence of 72 years, with 22

years suspended. Jabar was sent to Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center, where he would stay until his 21st birthday, when he would move to an adult facility in Virginia.

Jabar's final serious offender review before leaving Bon Air was in the spring of 2020, just as BAJCC was hit with an unprecedented outbreak of COVID-19, the worst outbreak in a juvenile facility in the country. As a measure to contain the virus, youth were confined to their cells for up to 23 hours a day. At this serious offender review, Jabar's record at BAJCC was examined and his sentence was reconsidered based on the recommendations of all who'd worked with him at Bon Air. The same judge who'd originally sentenced Jabar dismissed the testimonies of staff, teachers, therapists, and clergy like me, the stacks of letters from friends, and the support Jabar received from those around him. Despite a significant amount of positive feedback, and utterly devastatingly, Jabar's full sentence was upheld, and he was returned to isolation at BAJCC. With his transfer to adult prison looming and no access to his support system to process this blow, Jabar and another young man, Rashad Williams, aided by at least two staff, overpowered a guard and escaped from Bon Air in the early morning hours of July 13, 2020.

As abolitionist cries to shrink policing and shutter prisons were being covered in news headlines, those same outlets published articles flattening the boys into criminal tropes, calling them "dangerous felons." No mention was made of the harrowing realities that these boys escaped—severe lockdowns, the prospect of a lifetime of incarceration, and a system that isolated them, beginning when they were adolescents, from all family and community.

I believe that because we still operate with racist biases, especially when it comes to violent offenses, the community accepts narratives that reduce young people of color to criminals while remaining blind to that which demands collective transformation…

The boys were eventually found and peacefully brought in, and both Jabar and Rashad will serve additional time for their escape. Jabar, and his family, bear the weight of so many of the attendant crises in the criminal legal system—for example, the public reading of Black and brown youth as adults, and the systemic demarcation of sentence length as the only measure of accountability for harm. The drivers of violence can be seen in his experience—Jabar was publicly shamed by a judge at the hands of the courts, he's been repeatedly exposed to violence on the inside, he experienced extreme isolation for weeks during the COVID-19 pandemic and has been isolated from community, family and friends since his incarceration began. But most frustratingly, I believe that because we still operate with racist biases, especially when it comes to violent offenses, the community accepts narratives that reduce young people of color to criminals while remaining blind to that which demands collective transformation—here, the trauma building in a COVID-ridden locked-down juvenile detention center, an over-sentenced young person's desperation and the collateral consequences of a broken prosecutorial system.

Why We Struggle with Violence

If we want to move the needle on equity in reducing the impact of mass incarceration, core beliefs must be challenged. We have to begin to re-evaluate the utility of incarceration in reducing violence and providing accountability. But also, we have to gain clarity about the role of violent convictions in the exponential rise of mass incarceration.

Incarceration and Violence: Time for a Change

The rising consciousness of white Americans about racial disparities in incarceration has not been enough to produce the meaningful reductions in our national incarceration crisis—particularly not the kind of reductions needed to heal communities. I believe this can be traced to at least two reasons.

First, when it comes to understanding the mechanisms of the mass incarceration crisis, Americans frequently overestimate how many people are in prison for nonviolent drug offenses. We have fallen prey to what criminologist, John Pfaff, calls this the "Standard Story": the growth of the prison industry is the result of the prosecution of mostly young black men for drug crimes, which, when combined with mandatory minimums, has led to a booming prison economy that demands inmates in order to survive. Most Americans believe that over half of the prison population is incarcerated on drug charges, when the actual numbers are closer to 20%.

Pfaff, and other advocates, make clear that reform must be focused on the right things. Over 60% of the growth of state prisons over the past 40 years is actually due to the increased number of people incarcerated due to violent convictions. And while there is fairly high support among both liberals and conservatives for sentence reductions for non-violent offenders, most people—liberals and conservatives alike—do *not* support reducing sentences for violent crimes, even when offenders are described as unlikely to re-offend.

But I think there is a second, deeper reason as to why raising the consciousness of white Americans has not been enough to make meaningful change in mass incarceration. As Ta Nehisi Coates has said, "the presumption of criminality of black people is deeply written into the bones of this country."

In many ways, white Americans live by this presumption with transparency. The hashtag #Livingwhileblack enumerates infinite moments of ordinary life for Black Americans that are criminalized by whites. There are dangerous and deadly encounters with police. Despite mountains of evidence to the contrary and education efforts to disabuse white Americans of these notions, white Americans continue to report a belief that Black Americans are dispositionally more violence-prone than whites, and that Black Americans are more deserving of harsher, longer penalties when it comes to violent offenses.

But what about all of us who are reading the books, trying to "do the work"? What about the folks who are listening and learning and would never say, out loud, that we believe in the myth of Black criminality? So far, it hasn't been enough to generate meaningful change—we still have failed to move, to act with our bodies in ways that dismantle the systems that perpetuate violence. **Even when white Americans, in our conscious minds, articulate anti-racist perspectives, we still live in neighborhoods, go to schools, and make choices with our dollars that demonstrate that there is tremendous work to be done in addressing what Resmaa Menakem identfies as "white body supremacy."** "This is what elevates the white body above all other bodies, as the supreme standard against which other bodies' humanity is measured," writes Menakem.

Menakem describes the beliefs, practices, and ideas of white body supremacy as reflexive, like the belief of a claustrophobe that the walls are closing in. If we are born and raised in America, our bodies inevitably house, and are often subconsciously motivated by, this white body supremacy. This animates the white imagination about, and bodily response to, violence.[2] These are the wordless stories we carry about what threatens our safety, stories that are living in our amygdala, the feeling and panicking part of our brains, which in moments of crisis and fear overpowers the part of the brain that does book groups and posts inclusive yard signs.

Incarceration and Violence: Time for a Change

It should come as no surprise that there is something deep within us, pushing us to value and protect, by any means necessary, the white body, and to essentialize all others as dangerous and disposable. In the United States, there is a direct line from plantation to prison as setting for social control and white profit in response to not only Black Americans, but Latinx, and Native Americans. From our founding to the present, one of the distinguishing features of the American project has been a narrative about rising minority crime rates, corresponding public anxiety and then the use of state isolation to contain and control those communities in response. But this direct line isn't just ideological, it is in the physical land upon which we live. In Bon Air, Virginia, Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center is built on land that was once worked by slaves owned by Robert Murchie.[3] When Jabar escaped after a devastating court review that instead of offering a measure of accountability, condemned him to die in prison, the parallels were difficult to miss.

The specter of violent offenses threatens our white sensibilities, and the power of the prison industrial complex depends on maintaining that sense of threat in order to survive. But lengthy, unrestrained incarceration for harms does not heal. It does not protect. It makes false promises. If we truly want to end mass incarceration's impact on communities, we must do the work needed to sever our reliance on, and belief in, incarceration as the catch all for violent offenses. But in order to do that, we have to attend to what drives our acceptance of incarceration as the answer for harm.

What Can We Do

I am writing primarily to the folks in my community who look like me—to white and white-presenting folks who want change, feel stuck, and are curious about a system that looks at violence differently. The road to ending our reliance on mass incarceration for violent offenses is a long and complex one, involving not only difficult and personal perspective change but legislative changes that close doorways into the criminal legal system and fling wide open the doorways to community resources—even when there are harms to be addressed. A learning journey can be a good place to start.

- Move your anti-racist work from your brain to your body. There are lots of great resources online and in Richmond to introduce the concept of racial trauma.
  - » Cultural Somatics Free 5 Session E-course—a short free e-course.
  - » Foundations in Somatic Abolitionism—a year long intensive with Resma Menakem. There is a cost associated with this course.
  - » Richmond Hill Koinonia School of Race and Justice—follow their events schedule/course offerings.
- Follow Richmond's local Commonwealth Attorney's office
  - » Our local CA's office has recently begun the Community Justice Reform Unit. Follow their progress to see what is being done locally to reduce convictions and implement alternatives to incarceration.
  - » CA's in Virginia have an enormous amount of power and are your elected officials. CA Difference is a non-partisan Virginia campaign to raise public awareness about the power of the prosecutor's office in the justice system.
- Take some time and learn about Common Justice in New York. Common Justice is the first alternative to incarceration in the US that focuses on violent felonies in the adult system. Their program is based on restorative justice principles, and with victim consent only, offenders participate in a rigorous year to year and a half long violence intervention program.

Endnotes

1 Danielle Sered, *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and the Road to Repair.* (New York: The New Press) 67.

2 Sered, 59.

3 ResmaaMenakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathways to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies.* (Las Vegas: Central, 2017) 6.

Ashley Diaz Mejias

Originally from Memphis, Tennessee, Ashley Diaz Mejias began regularly challenging systemic bias while working as the educational director for a small nonprofit after graduating from college. Drawing on both her research and pastoral experience in men and women's correctional settings, Ashley has written for blogs and led curricula for institutional and congregational conversations on race, systemic bias, and mass incarceration and is currently a candidate for ordination in the Presbyterian Church, USA . When she isn't writing, she is either working with an amazing group of folks to grow the Richmond Community Bail Fund or she is pastoring at the Lord Jesus Korean Presbyterian Church. She earned her MDiv from Union Presbyterian Seminary in 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Intentionally Connecting with the Other

OSCAR F. CONTRERAS TELÓN

To intentionally build relationships across groups, have honest conversations and to truly learn about each other we need to:

- **Start conversations across differences** to learn about each other and act with compassion, especially for those in positions of influence or privilege.
- **Create cross-cultural community spaces for joy, healing and sharing.**
- **Move towards transformation by investing time to connect with others.**

When Black [Girls'] Lives Really Matter

ANGELA PATTON

Investing in the development of resilient and confident Black girls will result in changemakers who will be Richmond's teachers, doctors, and artists. Selected strategies for fostering this Black girl magic:

- **Develop and use your justice muscles** to see and value Black lives and Black girls, rather than disregarding or trying to silence them.
- **Lift up Richmond's Black Women led organizations** and support them equitably compared to the white led organizations our city tends to support.
- **Build a movement** to support Black girl programs by advocating for resources that serve to cultivate Black girls, exploring alternative forms of expression that showcase Black girls, and stopping policing Black girls' bodies, ways of dress, language, hair, nails, and words.

Massive Resilience: An Emergent Strategy for Racial Equity in Richmond, VA.

DR. RAM BHAGAT

Massive Resilience is a set of practices to build resilience for challenging systemic racism based on the universal values of Ubuntu, Sawubona, and Sankofa; centered on the principles of interconnectedness, *inter-relatedness, and inter-resilience*, which collectively promote compassion, courage, and creativity.

Strategies that support Massive Resilience as a transformative cultural experiences designed to increase social emotional competence and eliminate racist policies include:

- **Intra-racial healing in schools and communities** that integrates four spheres of engagement: art, culture, education, and health and encompasses four arcs of engagement: trauma healing, restorative practices, mindfulness, and artfulness.
- **Strong white allies** to cross the color line to engage in the process of transforming historical harms and advocate for Massive Resilience.

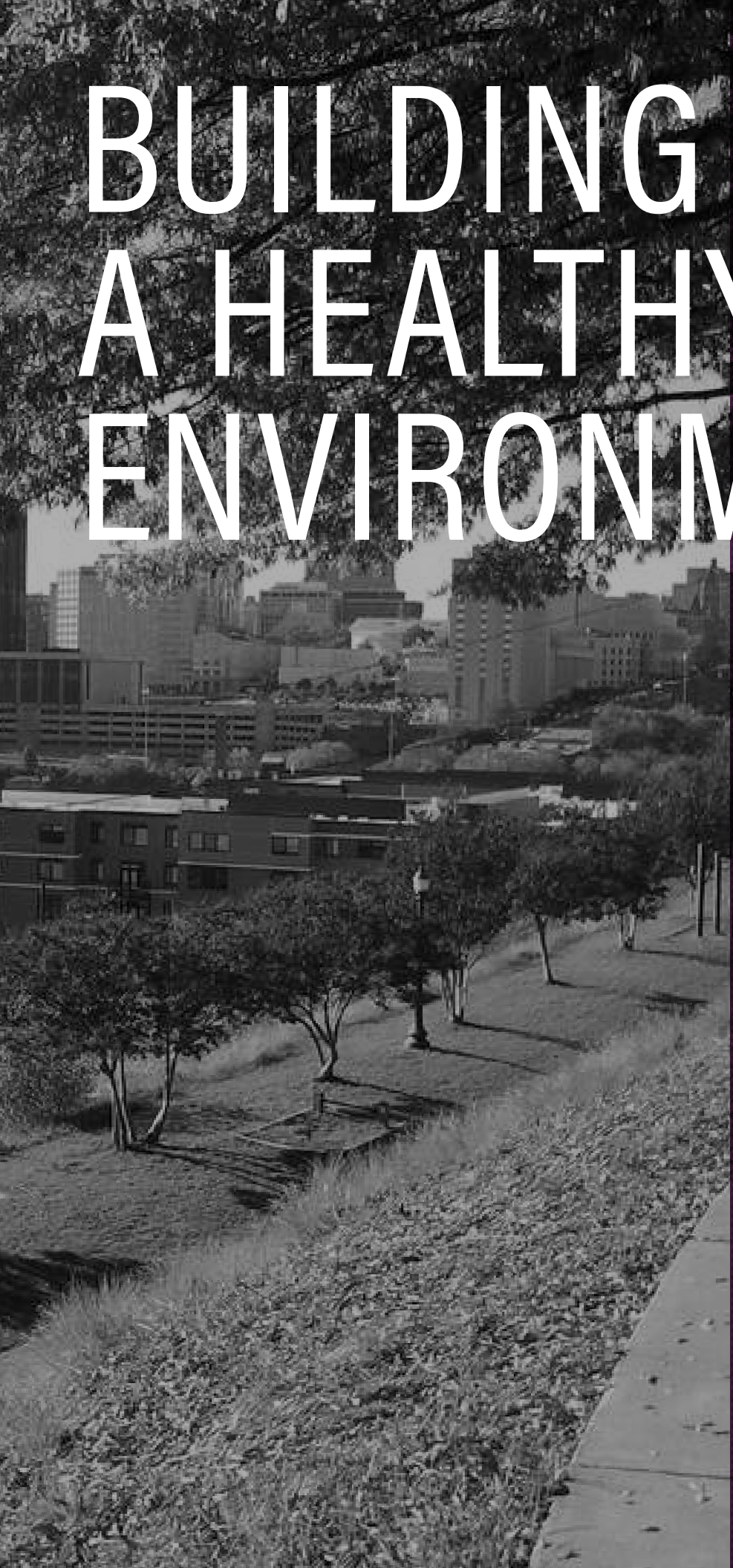
RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

Incarceration and Violence: Time for a Change

REV. ASHLEY DIAZ MEJIAS

The road to ending our reliance on mass incarceration for violent offenses is a long and complex one, involving personal perspective change and legislative changes that close doorways into the criminal legal system and open the doorways to community resources. Strategies to help white folks begin their learning journey:

- **Move your anti-racist work from your brain to your body.** Here are some resources online and in Richmond to introduce the concept of racial trauma.
  - » Cultural Somatics Free 5 Session E-course
  - » Foundations in Somatic Abolitionism
  - » Richmond Hill Koinonia School of Race and Justice
- **Follow Richmond's local Commonwealth Attorney's office.**
  - » Our local CA's office has recently begun the Community Justice Reform Unit.
  - » CA Difference is a non-partisan Virginia campaign to raise public awareness about the power of the prosecutor's office in the justice system.
- **Learn about Common Justice in New York,** the first alternative to incarceration programs in the US that focuses on violent felonies in the adult system.



BUILDING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Radically Reimagining Our Systems

DANNY TK AVULA, MD, MPH
Director of the Richmond City and Henrico County Health Departments

Anyone who has been on the leadership team of a health organization in the past few years can tell you that when it's time to update your strategic plan or submit a proposal for funding, the word "equity" goes front and center. Organizations across the region (my own included) use "equity" whenever possible: we are equity-driven, have an equity lens and an equity framework, are building toward equity, and share pro-equity posts on social media. But using the *word* "equity" is not the same as committing to do the difficult and sustained work it requires to realize equity in the Richmond Region. The more we use the word "equity" as a catchall for our good intentions, the more we dilute its meaning and make it a harder goal to reach.

There's a world of difference between including the word "equity" in a mission statement and really living into that mission in every decision an organization makes. It's not unlike the concept of love—I regularly tell my wife and kids that I love them, but it's not using the words that leads them to believe it. It's the day-in-day-out showing up. The listening, the time spent together, the navigating through hard things. It's doing the work that helps them know that I love them. Our organizations can't just use the words, ; we've got to do the work. And it has to be serious work-- not just doing a little bit more than we did before, but doing the long, hard, system-changing, and soul-changing work. We have to actually believe in, and actively work towards, a future where *everyone,* regardless of the school they went to, the neighborhood they grew up in, or the color of their skin, has the opportunity to achieve a state of health and wellbeing. And we've got to do whatever it takes to get there.

To be clear, I'm not trying to preach as someone whose organization has figured out how to do whatever it takes. Like everyone else, we have our own hurdles to overcome. There is much work to be done around issues like equitable pay, and having a workforce and a leadership team that is more reflective of the diverse communities we serve throughout Henrico and Richmond. But we are approaching the work with intention and commitment, and we are on the journey. What follows are a few reflections of what it looks like for organizations to do this work, in the substantive and unremitting manner that will be required to see real change in our region.

Recognize that Our Systems Perpetuate Disparity

Recently, our health department's Director of Health Equity, Jackie Lawrence, wrote in a message to our staff that **our work ought to "radically reimagine, plan, and implement systems changes that remove obstacles, ensure resilience, and highlight joy in communities of color.**" It's a powerful charge—one that compels us to keep our eyes focused on the systems that have perpetuated disparities in health outcomes among Black, Latinx, and Indigenous Americans for decades, and simultaneously inspires hope by focusing on the resilience and joy present within these communities.

Over the past decade, we have invested heavily in an expansion of services that goes beyond the four walls of our health department. We have opened health access points in eight public housing communities and other low-income neighborhoods to better serve black and brown people who historically have had less access to preventive services. As we built relationships in these neighborhoods, we were introduced to residents who had tremendous expertise, knowledge of their community, and the deep trust of their neighbors. This led to the building of our

Community Health Worker program, which has fundamentally changed the way we work with and for vulnerable communities. We reimagined our system of care in order to lower barriers to access and increase trust: instead of requiring residents to come to our building and see our experts, we are employing experts from within communities and offering care to residents in familiar and accessible spaces right in their own neighborhoods.

Develop Cross-Sector Solutions

One major advancement in the field of Public Health over the last 20 years has been the recognition and characterization of the Social Determinants of Health, and the development of interventions that appropriately address those determinants. We now clearly understand that health outcomes are not simply a function of whether you have access to a doctor, but rather a complex interplay of health behaviors, the physical environment, and social factors like education level, income, or stable housing.

True health equity…is going to require thoughtful collaborations and investments across the health, housing, community planning, and economic development sectors, among others.

This deepening understanding of the social determinants has pushed us to begin thinking more holistically about the clients we serve—we now screen for things like housing instability and barriers to employment, and offer navigation support as residents connect with other organizations to address these broader issues. This cross-sectoral approach has required a much higher level of coordination and alignment between different governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations, and we have been growing a team of Social Workers who are equipped to navigate people through this maze of supports, recognizing that many of our clients will not have the opportunity to achieve a state of health and wellbeing without addressing these crucial underlying determinants.

This cross-sectoral work is important at the individual level, but even more so at the systems level. Increasingly, our work has focused on conveying the population health impacts of investments in affordable housing, safe green space, or bike and pedestrian infrastructure. Working towards true health equity—**a state where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible—is going to require thoughtful collaborations and investments across the health, housing, community planning, and economic development sectors, among others.**

Drive Change with Data

The call to equity requires leaders to target investments and interventions in communities where they are needed most. We cannot do this consistently and reliably without local data, disaggregated by race.

The COVID-19 pandemic has consistently revealed how racial inequities seem to be coded into our nation's DNA. COVID-19 disproportionately hospitalized and killed Black and Latinx people across the country, largely due to the reality that those residents make up a higher percentage of frontline essential workers who did not have the option to work from home, and that they have more severe underlying conditions that put them at higher risk of serious complications from the disease. Having clarity about the impact of COVID-19 on different races and ethnicities gave Public Health practitioners and policymakers the ability to direct financial support and vaccination efforts to the communities that needed them most.

Radically Reimagining Our Systems

The ongoing work to achieve equity will require that we keep the data, disaggregated by race, in front of us at all times. Whether we're talking about infant mortality, incarceration rates, or income inequality, it is essential that we know the disparities we're trying to resolve, and that we're able to measure our progress.

Partner with the People

Over the years that we have sought to center our work on health equity, we have learned that we must engage the people we are seeking to serve as authentic partners in this work. This has required intentional and significant effort, as these are often the same people who have historically been left out of shaping our government's institutions.

Building trust, engaging leaders, and ensuring the community has a voice—these are skills we have developed over time, but they are not second nature. There are still occasions (more than I would like to admit) where we fall into the trap of believing "government-knows-best," and jump immediately to implementation. When we don't take the time to listen to the community, earn trust, and let community leaders drive the process, we end up implementing programs with less buy-in and little ultimate impact on health and wellbeing. But we also miss an opportunity to help residents claim their own agency in protecting their health and the health of their community, and any real progress toward health equity will require deep commitment in every community, now and into the future.

When we don't take the time to listen to the community, earn trust, and let community leaders drive the process, we end up implementing programs with less buy-in and little ultimate impact on health and wellbeing.

Conclusion

The commitments I outlined here might seem like a tall order, but I am more hopeful than ever that they can be accomplished with real commitment by organizations across our region because we saw it happen during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exposed and exacerbated every racial and economic inequity in our region, and organizations across sectors collaborated, invested, sought the counsel and leadership of residents, and generally reimagined care and change like never before. When a new challenge arose, we found the partnerships, funding, and capacity to lift up an equitable response. We put the work we had hoped to do on hold and rearranged our staffing and budgets to commit to addressing the urgent public health crisis at hand. **But racism has also been declared a public health crisis in Virginia, and the roots and impacts of racism deserve just as urgent a response from our government agencies, nonprofits, health systems, philanthropic leaders, and communities in the days ahead**.

Now more than ever before, I am ready for that kind of radical reimagining: for a commitment not to return to business as usual but to keep leaning in together and doing the hard work required to achieve racial and health equity. To listen well to our vulnerable communities and engender trust. To acknowledge the systems and structures that work to create disparities, and to keep the data in front of us to monitor our progress towards eliminating those disparities. Our communities deserve no less, and now that the pandemic has shown us what we are capable of, we owe it to our communities, our organizations, and ourselves to continue to invest more where more is needed, for as long as is needed, until racial and health equity are fundamental realities, not strategic ideals, in every community we serve.

Radically Reimagining Our Systems

Danny TK Avula

Dr. Danny Avula is Director of the Richmond City and Henrico County Health Departments. He is a public health physician board, certified in pediatrics and preventive medicine, and he continues to practice clinically as a pediatric hospitalist. After graduating from the University of Virginia, he attended the VCU School of Medicine, and completed residencies at VCU and Johns Hopkins University, where he also received a Master's in Public Health. He is an Affiliate Faculty member at VCU, where he regularly serves as an advisor and preceptor to graduate and medical students.

Governor McAuliffe appointed Dr. Avula to the State Board of Social Services in 2013 and he served as Board Chair from 2017 to 2019. He is the Immediate Past Chair of the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation, and serves on several other community boards. He has been named one of Richmond's "Top Docs" every year from 2013-2019. He is a recent recipient of the Virginia Center for Inclusive Community's Humanitarian Award, and in 2019, he was a Richmond Times Dispatch 'Person of the Year' honoree.

Spaces to Breathe

RYAN C. RINN
Economic Development Business Services Manager; City of Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Think back to the last time you were outside under the shade of a tree enjoying the breeze, the chirping birds, and the fresh air. Did your shoulders drop? Did some tension leave your body? Did you feel refreshed?

If you were like me, and many in the Richmond region, you have spent a good amount of time in public parks during last year's pandemic. In the 2020 calendar year, Richmond Parks saw an all-time record attendance proving that our parks are a treasure for the public good. They're free places to experience nature, relax, recharge, meditate, exercise and enjoy the company of friends and neighbors. They're places to just be, spaces to breathe. In an equitable city, green spaces should be accessible to everyone.

A special report from the Trust for Public Land, "Parks and the Pandemic," highlights just how important access to walkable greenspace is for quality of life. Ready access to parks and green spaces leads to better academic performance, improved cognition, better concentration, reduction in stress hormones, sound sleep, and faster recovery from injury, to name just a few health benefits. Sadly, yet predictably, this report also discusses how inequitably urban green spaces are geographically distributed based on race, with fewer acres of walkable parkland available to Black and Latino residents in comparison to white residents across the country.

The story is no different in Richmond, and this is linked to our racist history. During the 1970s when Richmond annexed a large postwar residential suburban section of Chesterfield County, they weren't doing so to acquire existing public amenities like parks. Instead, annexation was used to increase the number of white residents in Richmond to maintain a white-majority City Council. This strategy resulted in a moratorium on annexation that still applies within Virginia today. White flight took hold, and industrial facilities shut down in these newly annexed areas. Residents with means moved farther into surrounding counties. A decreasing city tax base led to fewer resources for public services, from schools, to infrastructure to parks. This lack of public amenities persists to this day and remains most concentrated in our census tracts inhabited by majority Black and Latino populations, especially neighbors in the South Side. Currently, our 8th and 9th Council districts, which are majority Black and Latino, have the most residents who cannot access a park within a 10-minute walk from their home; over 25,000 people lack this public amenity. That needs to change.

A racially equitable Richmond looks like every resident having the mental and physical health benefits of green space easily walkable from where they live. Researchers from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the University of Hong Kong and the City University of Hong Kong showed how equitably distributed urban green spaces promoted greater resiliency to COVID-19 for all races. Green spaces assist in faster recovery from all types of trauma, too. From centuries of not being able to breathe, and the collective trauma faced by our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community at the hands (or knees) of institutions, spaces to breathe are a necessity. Lower rates of diabetes, asthma, hypertension, anxiety and depression all correlate with access to green space.

Spaces to Breathe

Achieving a racially equitable Richmond requires us to make parks accessible to all, especially Richmond's Black and brown communities, by focusing funding on the historically marginalized, engaging in community-centered processes, protecting land in perpetuity and enacting policies that protect against green gentrification.

Racial equity requires focus and dollars in historically marginalized places first. Budgets are moral documents, and data helps us pinpoint where the most need exists. The 'Climate Equity Index' from our Office of Sustainability overlays more than thirty census tract level data points, and includes historic and current contextual data about institutional racism. We have the ability to see disaggregated data displayed geographically, and act intentionally. We must.

This data was the driving force in the first major park expansion initiative to take place in the City of Richmond since annexation and it pointed us to the city's 8th and 9th council districts. These districts are majority Black and Latino, have higher rates of poverty, less tree canopy, higher summer temperatures, and have seen less intentional investment in public amenity over time since the 1970's. This same data can be used to purchase and protect land for the public benefit and help reach the goal of an equitable Richmond, where every resident can walk to a green space.

Community-led and trusted organizations founded and run by Black and brown people have built their reputations and success on following through for their neighborhoods.

Racial equity requires community-led park onboarding and transparency of process. Community-led and trusted organizations founded and run by Black and brown people have built their reputations and success on following through for their neighborhoods. They often do this without equal access to funding and minimal administrative support systems. These organizations should be leaders in the process of building community trust and should be paid to do so. Collaborative grant applications in partnership with the City can help secure these funds, and budgets reflective of the necessity of this work should include line items for engagement.

I've had the great experience of working alongside and learning from our partners at Virginia Community Voice, Southside ReLeaf, and Groundwork RVA as we think about what new green spaces can be for South Richmond. Authentic engagement means building trust, establishing norms, and listening fully to one another. Direct communication, organizing, and developing a shared language of community aspiration for these spaces increases the likelihood of community buy-in, and the formation of a shared vision. City staff can be open and honest about budgets, operational realities and bureaucratic processes, and work alongside residents to develop community maintenance agreements, park names, specific amenities, and dedicated partner groups. Leaning into equity-based engagement in onboarding parks creates more dynamic and culturally relevant spaces.

Racial equity requires protecting urban land now for perpetuity. As explicitly stated in the purpose of Richmond 300, "Richmond is 62.5 square miles and is not allowed to annex land." Acquisition of land for green spaces will get more difficult as our population continues to grow. We must act now to buy, receive and or protect open green spaces for the public good. Tools like economic development scorecards and community benefit agreements should be leveraged to incorporate green space as a priority for our

neighborhoods when new development is proposed. Partnerships with land trusts can be expanded and conservation easements can be utilized to make sure new green spaces can be protected in perpetuity.

Racial equity requires the acknowledgement of, and policy protections from displacement through 'Green Gentrification.' Green gentrification refers to the urban phenomenon of increasing rents, and subsequent financial, cultural, and physical displacement of lower-income and non-white people following the creation or restoration of an environmental amenity, such as a new park. Tools mentioned above, like community benefit agreements, are one potential mechanism neighborhoods and the City of Richmond can use to protect existing residents so their quality of life improves in place, with the addition of a new green space. When plans for development proximate to new green spaces come through public commissions, committees and City Council, questions of affordability and community benefit should be the standard. Other mechanisms like the reduction or freezing of property taxes, rent stabilization vouchers, and incentives for low and middle income housing could also offer protection for existing residents.

A racially equitable Richmond looks like Black and brown-led onboarding of new parks in neighborhoods and communities where no greenspaces exist within walking distance. Community-led creation of public open space is the inverse of annexation, an anti-racist land use strategy that empowers residents to build and enjoy places for the people. These spaces are culturally relevant because culture was relevant in their creation. This Richmond has a better quality of life for everyone who lives here today, and spaces for everyone to breathe.

On a recent community walk through a soon to be new greenspace in Southside, I felt joy in the conversation and in the silence. Deep breaths with a view and a breeze, shoulders dropping and imaginations running wild. Exploration, laughter, curiosity, questions and possibility. There's a wholeness and a calm to the amenity of greenspace, and everyone deserves access to it.

Ryan C. Rinn

Ryan Rinn is a 21 year resident of Richmond and works for the City. His career has spanned from community organizing to urban planning to his current role with Parks & Recreation. He is a graduate of the University of Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University and lives with his husband Jason in the Byrd Park neighborhood.

Climate Resilience and Justice in Richmond

JEREMY HOFFMAN, PH.D
Scientist at the Science Museum of Virginia

When I was seven years old, I lived through one of the deadliest weather-related disasters in recent U.S. history.

It was July 1995 and my family lived in the northwestern suburbs of Chicago, IL, in a two-story house on a corner lot with a big, beautiful weeping willow tree and a few purple lilac bushes in the backyard (ironic to me now, because they're both non-native to Illinois, like us). My dad was a steel salesman and my mom was taking night classes to become a nurse and taught flute lessons on the side. We had a cocker spaniel that my older brother named Toby, after the baby in Jim Henson's, *The Labyrinth*. Most importantly for the purposes of this essay, we had central air conditioning.

Over the weekend of July 12-15, 1995, heat index temperatures (what it really "feels like" outside when combining the effects of air temperature and humidity on your body) in Chicagoland would soar to over 110°F during the day and be buoyed up over 80°F by the urbanized landscape overnight. Temperatures would sit at or over 100°F for 42 hours that weekend. This oppressively extreme heatwave had crippling effects on urban infrastructure: firefighters were opening hydrants and using the water to lubricate the bridges downtown, so water pressure would drop unexpectedly throughout the city. A few roads buckled and contorted, keeping emergency vehicles from reaching those in dire need of assistance, while rolling blackouts plagued neighborhoods across the city.

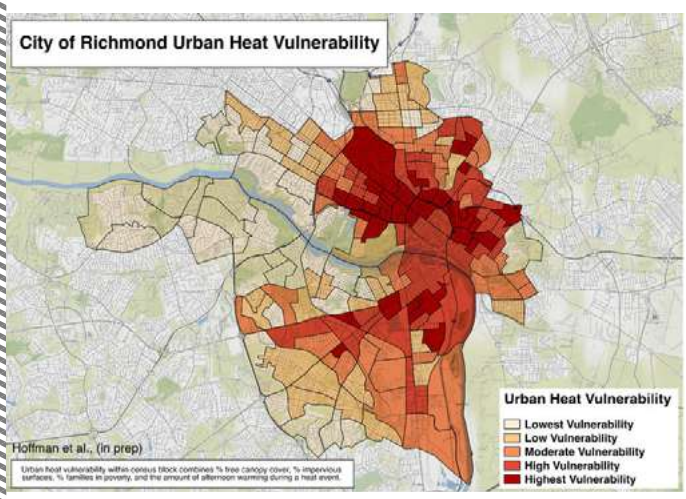
This heatwave also dramatically changed the way we understand how social equity and climate stressors interact in our cities. Depending on the estimate, over 750 people died over the course of the heat wave, and many of these deaths were attributable to heat-related exacerbations of underlying conditions like chronic respiratory diseases. Moreover, the relative risk of dying during the heatwave was substantially higher among the elderly and Black populations in Chicago. Eric Klinenberg wrote a book about this heat wave and showed that, among these disproportionately affected Black neighborhoods, there was a history of isolating disinvestment and social fragmentation that further elevated the risk of death.

Meanwhile, just a few miles away as the crow flies, I was enjoying my family's central air conditioning. We bought a small, plastic baby pool to put under the weeping willow's shade to cool us off when we ventured outside. We ate ice cream and freeze pops and used the slip-and-slide. We didn't suffer heat-related illness or death. The immense level of privilege and safety afforded to me and my family by the social structures that award and protect whiteness at the expense of Black life is sharply apparent in my otherwise rosy memory of the July 1995 heat wave. Today, as a white male climate scientist at an institution focused on expanding access to scientific information, I wonder how human-caused climate change—which has already made these heat wave events more common, longer in duration, and hotter than in decades past—will further amplify these existing inequities. **Furthermore, I have learned that we absolutely must invest in place-based strategies to prepare and empower communities with actionable science tools and data to achieve true climate justice.**

Human-caused climate change, brought about by the gradual accumulation of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere from the near-constant combustion of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gasoline to power our world, doesn't

affect humans the same way everywhere. Sure, I think that we hear about the effects of climate change more often now than we used to–it'll get hotter and wetter, and coastal cities are going to have a lot of flooding issues, and a lot of people are concerned about this (or they're blatantly denying that this exists)–but these impacts are usually spoken about at the scale of whole states, entire continents, or the world at large. Not only are climate change's effects talked about at such vague magnitudes, but in many cases we also hold on to the perception that the effects of climate change remain far away in time and place: it's not quite that bad yet; it's not so bad here. This is a common frame of mind that I encounter in my work, especially when interacting with predominantly wealthy, white audiences, where extreme climate impacts remain abstracted behind a veil of privileged adaptive capacity (like air conditioning, flood insurance) or overall lower exposure to the stressors to begin with (through infrastructure like parks and tree canopy).

Climate change simply amplifies the background hum of inequity in our world, which itself is perpetuated by the social systems that protect wealth and whiteness at the expense of communities of color.



What we lose when we speak about climate change on these kinds of scales of time (it's in the future) and place (it's far away from me), of course, are the residents. The neighborhoods. The city blocks. The communities. And as it turns out, it's at this scale where human-caused climate change really bears its gritty, inequitable teeth: any given person's "vulnerability" to climate change is really just an intensification of the precarity that they were already experiencing. I can tell you a lot about your "vulnerability" to climate change just by knowing your zip code. Climate change simply amplifies the background hum of inequity in our world, which itself is perpetuated by the social systems that protect wealth and whiteness at the expense of communities of color.

Here in Richmond, we see climate change inequity play out most dramatically in the urban heat island map that was generated with community science observations of air temperature during a heat wave in July 2017. We discovered a 16°F difference between the hottest and coolest places at the same time, in the same city. These temperature differences are largely explained by the amount of green amenities like trees and parks in some places and the dominance of hard, human surfaces like wide, multilane roads and short buildings in others. Much like the trends we saw play out in the 1995 heat wave in Chicago, these hotter areas experience higher rates of ambulance visits for heat-related illnesses and the majority (~60%) of those heat-related illnesses are experienced by people of color. The likelihood of experiencing a heat-related illness is also higher if you're near a stop on our transit system network or walking outdoors in these hotter areas.

To some, the results of our study were not altogether surprising, given the fact that the extreme heat map itself mirrored dozens of other maps of inequity in Richmond–food deserts, vacant properties, income, race, asthma,

diabetes, social vulnerability, and life expectancy all vary in step with our extreme heat observations. How does this come to be?

Over the last few years as a white male working on this research at a public science museum, I've needed to reflect on how best I can leverage my position and resources to amplify the mission of other organizations that are seeking to achieve justice across these intersectional issues. I've learned a lot about these topics from work like The Black Butterfly and The Color of Law, and had the opportunity to explore how the City's history of redlining, subsequent decades of disinvestment and marginalization through planning, and even preindustrial trends in neighborhood placement have either locked into place existing environmental inequity or physically made it worse both here in Richmond and around the country. But, exploring these trends and data doesn't ameliorate the generational trauma felt by present-day residents or achieve equity by itself–it merely shows us how intersectional the impacts of climate change are in the scope of all other inequities shaped by decision makers and policy for centuries.

So, What Do I Think Would Advance Environmental Justice and Climate Resilience in Richmond?

I strongly feel that we need to boldly create spaces that other cities have been afraid to offer: our institutions need to acknowledge the City's past and connect with their own history, leading with "radical vulnerability" (a term that I've learned from my colleague Duron Chavis) as well as humility; our grant proposal budgets need to focus financial support into organizations and projects that are already working to lift up the lived experience of marginalized communities of color in the climate justice planning process instead of creating duplicative efforts or unnecessary and damaging competition; we must continue the burgeoning trend toward concentrated, intentional community consultation on the design of and prioritization of capital projects that are needed to ameliorate environmental inequity. I understand that these strategies are long-range and amorphous and difficult to implement immediately, especially with the consistent pushback from historically privileged communities in taking on this approach. However, the co-benefits of employing these strategies in our climate action planning and execution may then permeate other processes, from transportation planning to housing to City budgets.

Our grant proposal budgets need to focus financial support into organizations and projects that are already working to lift up the lived experience of marginalized communities of color in the climate justice planning process…

What Can Be Done to Reduce the Extreme Nature of Our City's Thermal Inequity Over the Short Term?

Richmond could, with enough political will and leadership, install shade canopies across our transit and pedestrian area systems to provide the bare minimum of protection from extreme heat exposure almost overnight. These and other types of engineered shade structures are extremely effective and could be implemented virtually anywhere in the city, especially along our most-used bus routes. These structures would also shelter transit riders not only from heat but also from rain, snow, and wind. Built with native plant gardens and stormwater harvesting capabilities, we could see these transportation infrastructure investments as co-beneficial interventions that address numerous

urban design flaws that give rise to health and environmental inequity. Of course, we also know that trees are nature's air conditioning units–and there are fewer and shorter trees in formerly redlined areas. Investing in Tree Equity is yet another promising practice that has emerged as cities and nonprofits turn their attention toward thermal inequity as well as the mental and physical health benefits of living in greener areas. I've also explored how increasing a city's housing density (which, if mandated to include affordable, mixed-income communities and functional public green spaces by updating our zoning code, would address several of our current issues at once–including providing a way to minimize green gentrification) could lead to additional temperature relief during our hottest events by creating shade.

How Can We Realize Climate Justice Strategies?

Many of these strategies, both explicitly and implicitly, are being emphasized in our City's recent Richmond 300 plan as well as the rapidly-developing RVAgreen2050 plan, which specifically centers equitable approaches to climate change action throughout its process. While these plans are great progress (and we should celebrate them as such), we must demand more. Implementing these plans will require coalitions of organizations like those we've been working with on recent climate resilience literacy projects that understand that climate change justice is racial justice.

In my view, centering these values in our climate change resilience and environmental justice work would lead to climate resilience policy decisions in Richmond that incorporate the values of community members, demonstrably improve community health and wellbeing, and bolster socioeconomic equity across the city. There's also a way to see that these policies would transform other aspects of our city, such that your race or zip code no longer predicts your life expectancy, your income, your access to transportation, your summertime temperature, your food security, your propensity to chronic illness, your educational attainment, your credit score.

Jeremy Hoffman

Dr. Jeremy Hoffman is the Chief Scientist at the Science Museum of Virginia and Affiliate Faculty in the L. Douglas Wilder School and the Center for Environmental Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr. Hoffman connects audiences to their changing planet through participatory environmental research and interactive, hands-on, and immersive experiences, earning recognition as one of Style Weekly Richmond's Top 40 Under 40 in 2019 and one of the Grist 50 Fixers for 2020.

The Bus Should Be Free

WYATT GORDON
GRTC Transit Advisory Group Member
and
FAITH WALKER
Director of Community Engagement, RVARapid Transit

Mobility is freedom, but just as the slaveholders who founded this country never believed in liberty for all, today too, one need only look at a map of Richmond's bus system to see the limits of many folks' freedom. Routes that end at the county line and buses that only run once an hour are two of the most visible boundaries that fence in Richmonders' freedom. The most ubiquitous and all-too-often unquestioned limitation on our freedom, however, is the farebox. If we want to liberate ourselves from car-dependency, save the planet, and right the wrongs of the past, the bus should be free.

Public Good, Private Payment

The bus doesn't care if you can't afford a car, if your disability disallows driving, or if you've just had one too many drinks. As long as you're waiting at a stop, the bus will pick you up and carry you home—no questions asked. The bus epitomizes a public good: it's available to all, and society is better off the more people use it. The problem is that we treat the bus like a private company (and in Richmond it actually is). Unlike other public services such as libraries and schools, we expect the bus to pay for itself, largely on the backs of the working poor who take it.

Most Richmonders don't ride the bus regularly. Many residents of the surrounding suburbs never have. But whether you even know what GRTC stands for or not, you and your lifestyle are transit-reliant. The nurses in your hospital, the clerks at your local supermarket, and the custodians at your office or university represent just a fraction of the folks that rely upon the bus every day to get to work, to pick up their kids from school, and to shop or to seek out healthcare. Without access to fast, frequent, and reliable public transit, much of our economy and our society would come to a screeching halt.

The crucial role high-quality transit plays in our daily lives is easily overlooked by those who don't regularly ride the bus. When you're passing a Pulse on Broad Street or waiting behind a bus stopped to let folks on and off, public transit feels like little more than another vehicle in your way—an inconvenience to your personal commute. From the outside, you can only vaguely make out the bodies of those on board. You know nothing of their lives and their stories. Take a trip with the Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) and you begin to see, understand, and empathize with your fellow passengers.

A dollar and fifty cents to ride may not seem like a lot, but for Tarrance Bryant—a new GRTC rider—that amount is the difference between a reliable route to work and walking. It can take up to three weeks to get your first paycheck at a new job, and many people just starting their careers or rejoining the workforce don't have money on hand to finance their commute in the meantime. That's why Tarrence supports zero-fare transit: "I like that it's free because at this time I just started working, and if it wasn't for it being free I wouldn't really have a ride to work. I would probably have to walk."

No Respect for Riders

Politicians can always find funding to address the needs of the wealthy and well-connected. Issues important to those who take transit are often just as ignored as those who tend to ride the bus most: the working poor, the disabled, the elderly, teenagers, and people of color.

Twenty-seven percent of bus riders in Richmond have a combined *household* income of less than $10,000 per year. Over half earn less than the federal poverty rate for Virginia of $26,500 for a family of four, and a full 89 percent of GRTC's riders have household incomes below the state median. If bus riders' lacking affluence weren't already enough of a reason for the powers that be to ignore their plight, nearly three quarters of those who take transit are people of color.

In America, we all agree that talk is cheap. For all the verbal praise heaped upon our "essential workers" throughout the course of the pandemic, we didn't do enough to keep folks on the frontline safe. Instead of introducing substantive policy changes in response to the racial reckoning that was the murder of George Floyd, our society settled on BLM book clubs and empty promises of equity.

The complexities of race, class, and poverty in the United States—much less in the former capital of the Confederacy—seldom allow for simple solutions. If our goal is to expand the freedom of our friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors, then eliminating bus fares is one of the most straightforward and equitable actions we can take.

If our goal is to expand the freedom of our friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors, then eliminating bus fares is one of the most straightforward and equitable actions we can take.

Fund Our Future

The cost of a year's worth of access to GRTC adds up to $720. Scraping together the $60 needed for a monthly pass often proves so impossible for many poor riders that they end up spending roughly $1,000 a year on fares, paying $1.50 each time they ride. If the bus were free like many other public services we all rely upon, Central Virginia's poorest would get to keep that cash to pay for other essential expenses like housing, food, and healthcare. Going fare free functions as a backdoor boost to wages by allowing those who take transit to work to keep more of their money.

Eliminating fares may sound like an expensive endeavor, but in actuality, the cost is minor. In fiscal year 2019, GRTC collected $4.5 million in revenue from local routes in the City of Richmond, the same routes which are primarily frequented by low-income people of color. That means for roughly five million dollars a year, we could all ride the bus for free whenever we want, as much as we want. Going fare free would also allow GRTC to end fare enforcement, protecting passengers from over-policing and empowering bus operators to avoid conflict with riders who can't afford their fare.

Five million dollars is a lot of money. However, compared to the $33 million that the City of Richmond plans to spend on road repaving this year, the $170 million raised annually by the Central Virginia Transportation Authority, or the seven billion dollar budget the commonwealth gives VDOT each year, five million dollars is practically a rounding

error. Any or all of these sources could easily eliminate bus fares in Greater Richmond, but we must demand it of our local leaders and state representatives.

The New York Times estimates that 100 cities around the world offer free public transit, with many of them in Europe. But recently, cities in the United States such as Kansas City, Mo and Olympia, Washington have begun to implement fare free transit as well. Why can't Richmond be the next city to embrace free public transit? It's easy to tout an equity agenda or hire a diversity and inclusion officer; however, it's much more meaningful to put your money where your mouth is. If we want to honor essential workers and invest in eliminating racial inequities, then we must prioritize the needs of our neediest neighbors and make the bus free permanently.

Wyatt Gordon

Wyatt Gordon is a born-and-raised Richmonder with a master's in urban planning from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and a bachelor's in international political economy from the American University in Washington, D.C. He currently covers transportation, housing, and land use for the Virginia Mercury. He also works as a policy and campaigns manager for land use and transportation at the Virginia Conservation Network. Wyatt is a proud Northsider you can find walking, biking, and taking the bus all over town.

Faith Walker

Faith Walker grew up in Richmond's East End and still calls the area home. She currently serves as the Director of Community Engagement for RVA Rapid Transit—Virginia's only public transportation non-profit, which represents transit riders. Faith has a long track record for using creative solutions to address systemic issues, community engagement and commitment to cultivating long-lasting partnerships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Radically Reimagining Our Systems

DANNY TK AVULA, MD, MPH

Working toward health equity will require deliberate strategies, including:

- Working towards true health equity, is going to require **thoughtful collaborations and investments** across the health, housing, community planning, and economic development sectors, among others.
- The call to equity requires leaders to **target investments and interventions in communities where they are needed most**, which is done consistently and reliably using local data, disaggregated by race.
- **Building trust, engaging leaders, and ensuring the community has a voice** so that residents claim their own agency in protecting their health and the health of their community.

Spaces to Breathe

RYAN C. RINN

Making parks accessible to all, especially Richmond's Black and brown communities can be realized through a host of strategies, including:

- **Focusing dollars in historically marginalized places first.** We have the ability to see disaggregated data displayed geographically, and act intentionally. We must.
- **Investing in community-led park onboarding and transparency of process.** Leaning into equity-based engagement in onboarding parks creates more dynamic and culturally relevant spaces.
- **Protecting urban land now for perpetuity.** Partnerships with land trusts can be expanded and conservation easements can be utilized to make sure new green spaces can be protected in perpetuity.
- **Acknowledging and setting policy protections from displacement** through Green Gentrification.

Climate Resilience and Justice in Richmond

JEREMY HOFFMAN, PH.D

Environmental justice and climate resilience can happen in Richmond using strategies including:

- **Acknowledging the City's past and connecting with their own history,** leading with "radical vulnerability" as well as humility.
- **Focusing financial support into organizations and projects** that are already working to lift up the lived experience of marginalized communities of color in the climate justice planning process.
- **Reducing the extreme nature of our City's thermal inequity over the short term** by installing shade canopies across our transit and pedestrian area systems to provide the bare minimum of protection from extreme heat exposure almost overnight.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

- **Adopting climate justice strategies that center equitable approaches** to climate change action throughout our processes.

The Bus Should Be Free

WYATT GORDON AND FAITH WALKER

The bus should be free.

- We must prioritize the needs of our neediest neighbors and make the bus free permanently.
- Eliminating fares would cost roughly five million dollars a year.
- Going fare free would also allow GRTC to end fare enforcement, protecting passengers from over-policing and empowering bus operators to avoid conflict with riders who can't afford their fare.

CONCLUSION

From Ideas to Action

EBONY WALDEN
and
MEGHAN Z. GOUGH

This project would not have been possible without the willingness of all 24 of the essayists to offer their personal experience, professional expertise and transformative ideas to create a dynamic vision and concrete strategies to advance racial equity in Richmond. To all of the essayists, thank you for your contribution to thought leadership in our region. These essays have much to teach us about the racial inequities that plague our lives and our city, but also about how we might dismantle racism and reimagine a new future.

Racial equity is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, racial equity is realized when race no longer determines one's ability to thrive and be successful. As a process, racial equity is the practice of meaningfully involving marginalized people in the decisions that impact their lives. The overarching themes gleaned from this collection and categorized below can help inform our actions and processes and influence outcomes towards a more racially equitable future. I hope readers reflect on these themes and strategies, perfect them, and put them into action.

Personal Transformation

Advancing racial equity requires a change in personal perspective, and we see that theme throughout many of the essays. Michael reminds us of the important values, such as respect for elders and love of our neighbor that should be the basis for our community engagement and decision making. Lea, Bekah, Damon and Meghan, encourage us to shift the way we relate to those who are most impacted by inequities, recognizing their value, expertise and creating space for those who are most marginalized to step into power. Oscar lets us know that we need to intentionally create space for relational and cultural connection across differences. Angela prompts us to change how we view Black girls, to value their lives and contributions, and to invest in their futures. Dennis invokes white people to work with other white people to address the white backlash that undermines racial equity. Ram gives us Massive Resilience as a tool to heal Black people and communities through arts, culture, education and health. And finally, Ashley prompts us to rethink our approach to mass incarceration for violent offences and tells us to move our anti-racist work from our brain to our body to begin to heal our racial trauma.

Institutional Change

The essays make clear that whether business, non-profit or government organizations, changing the policies and practices that create barriers to prosperity for people of color is a must. Lea and Bekah encourage the non-profit sector to change the way they engage communities of color by centering their experience and expertise. They challenge us to fundraise differently and fund Black led non-profits sufficiently. Brian encourages the business community to adopt more equitable practices and remove barriers to Black and brown entrepreneurs. Shanteny makes it clear that greater representation, cultural appreciation and power distribution for Latinos needs to take place, while Gabriella advocates for empathy, empowerment and linguistically and culturally accessible services for the Latino community.

Conclusion: From Ideas to Action

Reallocating Resources

Creating a more just and equitable world will require intentional reallocation of resources and investment into the lives and communities that have been deprived. Ebony believes investing in Black and brown communities that promote property ownership and entrepreneurship is key. Shekinah gives us Brown Circles as a framework for Black collective financial liberation while Taikein, Genevieve and Ben point us towards transforming the way we approach and fund education. Maritza advocates investing in public infrastructure that reconnects our city and establishing programs that increase generational wealth. Ryan, Jeremy, Danny, Wyatt and Faith clearly communicate that we need to target our health, climate, greenspace and transportation resources and interventions where they are needed most (using data) and to the historically marginalized first.

Changing Policy

History has taught us that policy plays a significant role in creating and perpetuating systemic racism. Heather and Mariah remind us that it was housing policy that helped segregate our communities. Thus, we need to enact new policies and allocate new resources to make sure we have affordable rental and homeownership options available in every neighborhood, such as inclusionary zoning and property tax relief. Likewise, Martiza proposes rewriting the zoning ordinance as a way to facilitate more housing options. We also need policies that provide greater access and alternatives to our existing systems. Tanya exhorts local governments in the region to adopt a comprehensive immigration integration policy that centers language access services. Ashley points us to models like Common Justice than enable alternatives to incarceration.

Multi-Sector Collective Action

Finally, the essays communicate that it will take our collective vision and action to move toward an equitable future for our city. Actions include building awareness of various issues, catalyzing strategies like those presented in this collection, and supporting the work of both grassroots and advocacy organizations to influence political action. To do this, we need a comprehensive, multi-sector, intergenerational, intersectional approach to our anti-racist work, which links people, communities, and strategies across policy arenas.

The work ahead of us is hard, but the time is now. We hope these ideas create conversations and collaborations that lead to innovation and change for Richmond, and perhaps create new models for advancing racial equity in our nation.

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